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The Margins Write the Empire Down
How Identity and Language in Rushdie`s *Midnight`s Children* and Kureishi`s *The Buddha of Suburbia* Subvert Britain`s Cultural Hegemony

(versão corrigida e melhorada após defesa pública)

Andrea de Fraga Pires Toste

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To: my tutors; . . . and: Kemet-Noor; Mezuzah-Elsbeth; Copycat; Tora-Gasolina; Sibila-Atalanta (& siblings), who will never read this and couldn´t care less.

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RESUMO

Ao longo da presente dissertação analisamos, com base em conceitos e na metodologia dos Estudos Pós-Coloniais, de que forma o conceito de identidade e o questionar de metanarrativas (como história ou nação) permitem contradizer os supostos valores e princípios da hegemonia cultural britânica nos romances *Midnight`s Children* (1981), de Salman Rushdie, e *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), de Hanif Kureishi. Ambos os romances, representativos da ficção pós-colonial e pós-moderna britânica, são escolhidos para demonstrar como o conceito de identidade e como estratégias narrativas, como o humor, o realismo mágico ou a fantasia, são usadas para subverter expectativas e criticar leituras únicas de universos culturais como o britânico. Ambos desafiam quer as expetativas de encontrar a defesa de uma etnia/cultura, quer a demonização ou culpabilização de uma outra cultura, permitindo questionar leituras etnocêntricas e perspetivas estabelecidas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: pós-colonialismo, identidade, hegemonia cultural, híbrido, *Midnight`s Children, The Buddha of Suburbia*.

ABSTRACT

Based on Post-Colonial concepts and methodology, this dissertation analyzes how the concept of identity and the questioning of metanarratives (such as history or nation) allows for the contradiction of the (supposed) values and principles of British cultural hegemony in *Midnight`s Children* (1981), by Salman Rushdie, and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), by Hanif Kureishi. These two novels, which are representative of British post-colonialism and postmodernism, are chosen in order to demonstrate how their depiction of identity and how narrative strategies like humour magical realism or fantasy are used to subvert expectations and criticize single interpretations of cultural universes like the British one. Both novels defy the reader`s expectations of finding the defence of one ethnicity/culture as opposed to the demonization or culpability of another which allows the questioning of established perspectives.

KEYWORDS: postcolonialism, identity, cultural hegemony, hybrid, *Midnight`s Children, The Buddha of Suburbia*.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation analyses *Midnight`s Children* (1981), by Salman Rushdie, and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), by Hanif Kureishi. Salman Rushdie, a first generation immigrant, was born in 1947 to an affluent Muslim Bombay family and grew up in Mumbai, graduated with honours from King's College, while the Londoner Hanif Kureishi (b. 1954) is the son of an English mother and a Pakistani father. *Midnight`s Children* (*MC*) focuses on India's transition from British colony to independence and the partition of India, and the lives of its characters are profoundly connected with the social historical events of the time of the action. Its narrator, Saleem Sinai, fearing imminent death, decides to tell Padma (his companion) his life story which depicts the events and experiences in the lives of three generations of the Sinai family and their relation to the history of the nation. He is born at midnight, August 15, 1947, at the exact moment when India gains its independence from Britain. It so happens that all children born in India between 12 a.m. and 1 a.m. on that day have special powers; some are telepathic, others possess blinding beauty, the ability to transform into animals and change size or gender at will, and are gifted with prophecy and sorcery. Saleem is born with an extremely sensitive sense of smell and telepathic powers which he uses to contact hundreds of dispersed children in order to have them come to the Midnight Children's Conference. In this event, all the children of midnight are to reflect on the current situation that India is facing as a new nation of diverse cultures, political perspectives, languages and religious beliefs, much like Britain itself which is presented in *The Buddha of Suburbia* as a culturally diverse society. All the while, Saleem tries to understand the reason for these powers, he tells the story of his family (and uncovers its secrets) and how its members lived through this historically complicated period. While Rushdie uses magic realism as a way to commentate India's adaptation to its postcolonial status, Kureishi uses realism to represent the multicultural British metropolis after the end of the British empire.

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (*BOS*) focuses on Karim Amir, the son of an English mother (Margaret) and an Indian father, Haroon Amir. Karim wants to leave Bromley, a suburb of London, where he feels he is not free to be himself or is able to follow an acting career. He helps his father pretend to be a guru and they start to mingle with the British upper class. Later on when his parents get a divorce, they end up moving to London (a city Karim has great expectations about) when his father moves in with his girlfriend, Eva Kay. Karim then enters the world of the British upper class only to find that he is seen as an

Indian stereotype. The meaning of stereotype referred to here is Rogério Miguel Puga`s definition of stereotype as a powerful emotional and cultural construct about the cultural Other and the Self to manipulate the image of both (31-36). And, while Karim suffers and often does not agree with the stereotyping of Indians made by theatre directors, he decides to benefit from their construct of Indian culture and agrees to take part in the plays. The protagonist experiments with his identity, particularly his sexual identity, while pursuing acting, and takes the reader through the various racist attacks he endures. Throughout the novel Karim becomes disappointed with his father, a self-proclaimed guru to London`s high society, because he realizes he has not done anything with his life, and returns to his mother`s house to revive the bonds with her and his brother.

These two novels are chosen because, despite having a completely disparate writing style and being completely different in expressing their critical opinions, there is a similar critical perspective that this study perceives underneath the novels' story line. The authors` way of expressing themselves cannot be more different: language wise, while Rushdie mixes English and Indian creating a new, marginal vocabulary, Kureishi uses the slang language of the suburbs to realistically represent the margins of mainstream Britain. Despite this fact they do share similarities. Both Rushdie (British Indian born in Bombay into a Kashmiri Muslim family) and Kureishi (born in England to an English mother and a Pakistani father), being culturally hybrid themselves, favour hybridity and liminality in the writing of their novels. The definition of liminality adopted is Bhabha`s notion of liminality as a passage between identities. An in-between transitional state outside dichotomies: of not belonging to either one culture or the other, or one gender or the other) that occurs, for instance, when moving from one identity to another (Bhabha 53-59). Hence, according to Bhabha, liminality is connected with the concept of hybridity. For him this in-between liminal space allows individuals to construct a cultural hybridity that equally expresses characteristics of two or more cultures without favouring one over the other (Bhabha 53-59). The two novels depict identities that are at the margins of British society both culturally (segregated because British cultural hegemony inherits a sense of cultural superiority towards Indian culture, as *Midnight`s Children* reveals) and they are also physically segregated to the marginal suburbs of London, like Bromley, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the novels' depiction of identity, namely the fluidity the novels attribute to personal identity and the unreliability of its markers (such as

blood, name, ethnic affiliation and gender identity), and the employment of narrative strategies (such as humour and magical realism). The concept of identity adopted refers to Hall`s definition of identity ("Introduction: Who Needs ´Identity`?") as an identification with shared characteristics with another person or group and also a construction, a process that is never completed (2-3). The intention is to reveal how liminality and hybridity can be subversive because they can be employed to speak for and about the people that are at the margin, outside determined set categories established by power structures and that the manner in which these two subjects (identity and narrative strategies) are used in the novels ultimately leads to the questioning of the metanarratives (like history or nation) created by the former European colonizing power. This dissertation compares the two main subjects of identity and narrative strategies in both novels which seems to be a significant perspective because the theoretical body of knowledge regarding these two novels, although fertile in studies about their presentation of identity and language, lacks in linking their hybridity and language play with the subversiveness of British cultural hegemony

IDENTITY AND HYBRIDITY

This dissertation compares the subject of identity in both novels and how every marker of identity (blood, name, ethnic affiliation and gender) is fluid, unreliable and hybrid and how this can be considered subversive. Thus, it takes into account Homi K. Bhabha`s concept of hybridity as a contradictory space because of the different cultural perspectives of both colonizer and colonized (Young 21-24). He sees hybridity as the outcome of colonial power, something that "enables a form of subversion . . . an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power" (Young, 21). For Bhabha the colonial power itself creates this subversive, counter-authority movement because the resulting hybridity allows different, contesting points of view to be put forward (Young 136). These two very different novels seem to prove Bhabha`s point as they put forward the perspective of the marginal Indian of Britain`s suburbs (*The Buddha of Suburbia*) and the perspective of the Indian citizen of a newly independent India (*Midnight`s Children*).

Critical studies on identity in *The Buddha of Suburbia* have focused on the hybridity of the characters and how they move within the British-Asian binary: if and to what extent they identify with any of these two cultures. For Jago Morrison (*Contemporary fiction*), the novel's cultural diversity reveals the need for a different view of personal and national identity and a different concept of Britishness "based on inclusivity and plurality rather than parochialism and nostalgia" (62). In "Posed Ethnicity and the Postethnic: Hanif Kureishi's Novels", Mark Stein reflects on how the identity play in the novel ushers in a literature beyond the British or Asian literature labels (120-139). Similarly, Berthold Schoene in his article "Herald of Hybridity: The Emancipation of Difference in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia"* praises Kureishi for going beyond the stereotypes of discrimination of oppressor versus oppressed (112). Regarding the subject of performance, for Graham Huggan (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*) the creation of identities in the novel is the perfect example of identity being nothing but performative, and the author defends that the minorities depicted are encouraged to stage stereotypical identities in order to parody the expectations of white British people (95). Kureishi defies expectations by

not demonizing one ethnicity in favor of the other. He shows that characters from both ethnicities (or ethnically mixed characters) are all capable of appalling behaviour.

The notion that identitiess are structured around centres and margins is explored in relation to Karim, a character that moves from the margin to the centre and critics like Barry Langford in "Margins of the City: Towards a Dialectic of Suburban Desire" interpret the suburbs (margins) as a place of much more possibilities for reinvention because of its distance from London, the centre of British power (64-72). The interrelation between how the characters are shaped by life in the geographical centre or periphery is the focus of critics like Peter Childs in his essay "Suburban Values and Ethni-Cities in Indo-Anglian Writing" in which he researches how Karim`s move to London equals a social class change (91-107). In *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture*, Rita Felski links Kureishi's novel to George Orwell's negative depictions of suburbia, as she remarks that Kureishi`s description of "the petit bourgeois structures of feeling mapped out are remarkably similar to those described by Orwell" (40). She goes on to argue that in Kureishi's depiction, being lower-middle class echoes Orwell`s fiction because it is also marked by peer pressure, dull routine and rigidity.

The themes of identity and hybridity in Salman Rushdie`s *Midnight`s Children* have been thoroughly addressed by literary critics that, like Josna Rege in her essay "Victim into Protagonist? Midnight`s Children and the Post-Rushdie National Narratives of the Eighties", see it as celebrating "the creative tensions between personal and national identity" (Rege 145). Dieter Riemenschneider`s study *History and the Individual in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day* dissects Saleem`s memories about family life and history only to conclude that the novel`s main concern is a quest for identity (53-55). After considering the novel`s entanglement of personal and national identity, Julian Droogan`s essay "Memory, History, and Identity in the Post-Religious Universe of Salman Rushdie`s Midnight`s Children" asserts that history is fundamental for one`s notion of self because it is only through their perception of past and present events that they form an identity (208-209). Hence, he sees identity in *Midnight`s Children* as a product of history because it is through the connection to historical events that the narrator, by remembering India`s history, talks about his identity. The perspective in Sabrina Hassumani`s *Salman Rushdie: A Postmodern Reading of His Major Works* is that the hybridity that permeates the whole novel helps establish identity as a construct and the recalling and retelling of

history as inevitable distortions/versions of individual or political constructs (45-46). For M. K. Naik ("A Life of Fragments: The Fate of Identity in Midnight`s Children"), Rushdie depicts identity not as something defined but as something influenced by everything and everyone else and history itself. He exposes the identity fragmentation of every generation of Saleem`s family exploring the theme of fragmented identity in a hostile world. Hence, for him the novel shows "the permanent plight of individual identity in the hostile modern world which makes it impossible for anyone to remain an island but compels everyone to be part of a continent, with the result that the individual is inevitably ´handcuffed to history`" (Naik 54).

Numerous critics, although from different perspectives, ultimately consider the meaning unstable identities have in the novel. The multiplicity of identities seems to represent the narrator`s choice to emphasize the importance of multiple possibilities. This perspective is supported by the research of critics like M. Keith Booker ("Beauty and the Beast: Dualism as Despotism in the Fiction of Salman Rushdie") who, through the analysis of the game of Snakes and Ladders featured in the novel, studies the way Rushdie`s complex rhetoric addresses oppositions or dual thinking only to conclude that things are not just dual in nature but ambiguous and multiple (977-978). Ahmad Abu Baker, in his paper "Identity and Erasure in Salman Rushdie`s *Midnight`s Children*", analyses Saleem`s constant redefinition and rethinking of his identity and how this process is typical of an unstable identity of the postmodern world (94-96). Similarly, in *Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children*, Pradip Kumar Dey analyses the characters of the novel and concludes that the characters` hybridity is the result of the fact that the concept of fixed identity does not work (88-95). Emilia Ivancu`s critical reading of the novel (*Games of Identity and Alterity in the Novels of S. Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul*) focuses on Julia Kristeva`s concept of alterity in order to uncover the many identities and "alterities within either the one and the same person or among the many (human) beings that populate the world of Salman Rushdie" (Ivancu 283). In "The Characters with Lost Identity in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Chidren and Shame", Sajad Ganie conducts a precise analysis of the characters Saleem Sinai and Aadam Sinai to highlight the theme of lost identity: characters who do not know who their parents are completely lose the notion of their selves, or suffer a complete amnesia (32). Accordingly, albeit different, Neil Forsyth and Martine Hennard`s approach to the novel in "´Mr Mustapha Aziz and Fly`: Defamiliarization of ´Family` in Salman Rushdie`s Midnight s Children"

follows Roland Barthes´ idea that every novel can be read as a quest for origins only to discover one`s identity (197-202).

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* the subject of identity permeates the whole novel and, not only is it present in relation to the characters, but the fact that the novel can be considered a Bildungsroman (in which it is depicted the development of Karim`s identity) is significant. The genesis of such genre is the view of identity as something fluid and changeable as opposed to something static. Karim constantly recreates his identity as he moves between centre and suburbs. Centres and peripheries are important in the discussion of the subject of identity in the novel because, here centre equals being closer to the power institutions that occupy the city centre and what is not accepted is marginal and at the periphery. At the beginning of the novel when Karim tries to define himself, he justifies a great part of who he is to being brought up in the suburbs: "from the south London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of the continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it" (Kureishi, BOS 3). When it comes to the connection with centre/periphery, Karim Amir feels geographically marginalized and talks about what that means for his identity. He is eager to leave the suburb of Bromley, once proposed as Britain's most typical town, in which he feels condemned to live: "a dreary suburb of London of which it was said that when people drowned they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before them" (Kureishi, *BOS* 23). Bromley, the marginal suburb Karim wants to escape, although associated with the cultural and ethnic variety of immigrant communities is a place in which there is only one accepted (and very British) norm, where "in the pub . . . sat ageing Teddy Boys . . . a few vicious rockers too . . . discussing gang-bangs, their favourite occupation. And there were a couple of skinheads with their girls" (Kureishi, *BOS* 75). It is a dull, life-ending place with a rhythmic "bursting of frozen pipes in January, and the lighting of coal fires at seven in the morning" (Kureishi, *BOS* 26), where most people go to bed at ten-thirty and where Karim walks "through the gloomy, echoing streets to the pub, past turdy parks, . . . past the numerous bomb-sites which were our true playgrounds and sexual schools, past the neat gardens and scores of front rooms containing familiar strangers and televisions shining like dying lights" (Kureishi, *BOS* 74). Karim`s depictions of the suburbs establish a link between the tedium and austerity of the suburbs with the tedium and austerity of the accepted identity norm. So,

for Karim, the suburbs are places in which he feels constricted, stifled by the dull suburban routine that makes other people feel safe and not think of leading happier lives. Karim leaving Bromley and entering London often comes across just as hard as if he is in another faraway country. It is as if, for Karim, British hegemony relegates him to the margins and that is his ´nation`. As though as nation is not about a geographical place but the feeling/fact of being marginal.

Hence Karim wants to move to London which he sees as a world of opportunities. After all, "in London psychologists were saying you had to live your own life in your own way and not according to your family or you`d go mad" (Kureishi, *BOS* 62). From his perspective, London is a place where the social pressure he faces in the suburbs does not exist and this allows him to express himself freely socially. This is at odds with the perspective of critics like Barry Langford, according to which, the further away people are from the religious or political centre and its regulating discourses, the more identity becomes less stable and can challenge institutions. Kureishi`s novel shows otherwise. It depicts the marginal suburb of Bromley as a place of arrival of immigrants, a place of different cultures which, however, is not exactly is free from the societal control of a centre (London) that forces one to comply with British norm. Instead, Kureishi presents the opposite: the only place in which Karim feels he can recreate his identity is London. What this reveals is that the centre, once homogeneously British, is now a melting pot of hybridity with different peoples and identities of all sorts. And this feels like a victory for Karim. Moving from the margin to the centre gives Karim the feeling of possessing the Empire "so this was London at last, and nothing gave me more pleasure than strolling around my new possession all day. London seemed like a house with five thousand rooms, all different; the kick was to work out how they connected, and eventually to walk through all of them" (Kureishi, *BOS* 126). This seems to be Kureishi's way to say that the core (the centre) of Britishness is now taken over, possessed by the once marginal colonized other. Finally able to live in London following his parents` divorce and moving in with his father and his British girlfriend, for Karim this is a place saturated with possibility where all sorts of different others have come before to be whatever they want:

> the city blew the windows of my brain wide open. But being in a place so bright, fast and brilliant made you vertiginous with possibility. [. . .]

> Unlike the suburbs, where no one of note – except H. G. Wells – had lived, here you couldn't get away from VIPs. Gandhi himself once had a room in West Kensington, and the notorious landlord Rachman kept a flat for the young Mandy Rice-Davies in the next street; Christine Keeler came for tea. IRA bombers stayed in tiny rooms and met in Hammersmith pubs, singing 'Arms for the IRA' at closing time. [. . .] Kensington, where rich ladies shopped, and a walk from that was Earls Court, with its baby-faced male and female whores arguing and shoving each other in the pubs; there were transvestites and addicts and many disoriented people and con-merchants . . . and roaming strangers with no money and searching eyes. (Kureishi, *BOS* 126-127)In London there are innumerous ways of being and, unlike the still suburbs, there is movement, activity and all sorts of ways of creating identity: "people in Hyde Park playing bongos with their hands; [. . .] the keyboard on the Doors's 'Light My Fire'. [. . .] black people everywhere" (Kureishi, *BOS* 121).

London is the city where he believes he can be himself, or rather, create himself anew and pursue acting, another kind of performance, for he keeps experimenting with his ethnic and gender identities. Identity wise, Karim starts the story by defining himself, or his ethnic affiliations, quite dubiously. He describes himself as English, but not quite, and how the fact of not belonging to a set ethnic group makes him restless and makes him behave in a certain, almost erratic, way:

> My name is Karim Amir, and I am an English man born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the south London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of the continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it's enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family. I don't know why. (Kureishi, *BOS* 3)

It is also in this introduction that Karim defines his identity as something that is not established and that he, himself, has difficulties to define: a new breed of some sorts. He is not fully an Englishman and not truly an Indian and he believes that the enemy is the British cultural hegemony that imposes one acceptable norm: "my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them" (Kureishi, *BOS* 212). This restlessness of a shifting and undetermined identity also seems to be generational because Karim`s generation, unlike his father`s generation, is more accepting of this. Karim`s father, follows the fashion of his time in which the sons of middle or higher class families are sent to England to receive a British formal education so, "like Gandhi and Jinnah before him, Dad would return to India a qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer and accomplished ballroom dancer" (Kureishi, *BOS* 24). His father, weather it is because it is what he feels, that he has a defined identity as an Indian, or it is because white British people have never seen him as one of them but only as an Indian, concludes: "I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian. When I was young we saw the Englishman as a superior being" (Kureishi, *BOS* 263). Despite no longer identifying with India, many of the generation of Karim`s father and uncle have always been treated as foreigners and have never been given the chance to feel as they are British so they end up reinforcing their identity as Indians as a result:

> Now as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling: neither of them expressed any desire actually to see their origins again. 'India's a rotten place,' Anwar grumbled. 'Why would I want to go there again? It's filthy and hot and it's a big pain-in-the-arse to get anything done. If I went anywhere it would be to Florida and Las Vegas for gambling. (Kureishi, *BOS* 64)

In this state in-between identities they accept and reject what suits them and yet they would like to go for something else: they are not accepted as British or see themselves as British and do not desire to go back to India, but they would like to go somewhere else (the USA) instead. Even the older generation considers another option. And even though Karim's family members do not see India as the best of places (particularly Haroon), and they idealize it in order to define an identity as Indians: "we old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India" (Kureishi,

BOS 74). They either create an idealized identity mentally, or are open to embracing another culture, a third option out of the Asian-British dichotomy.

The younger generation of Karim and Jamila does not stay only on the mental plane and instead fully embraces the playfulness in the creation of multiple identities. They play with the fact that the British are confused as to where they are from and Karim confesses: "Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53). Karim admits to being something not defined that also includes being an Englishman and an Indian and, in-between, he feels the freedom to create all kinds of identities. There is an initial (later confirmed) hint of feeling tired of being trapped between two cultures, two ethnicities, and the choice of something else. He refuses the pressure of his Pakistani roots and the ideals of the British south London suburbs:

> I was sick too of being affectionately called Shitface and Curryface, and of coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and woodshavings . . . the other kids liked to lock me and my friends in the storeroom . . . they held chisels to our throats and cut off our shoelaces. We did a lot of woodwork at the school because they didn`t think we could deal with books . . . nothing`s changed. One kid tried to brand my arm with a red-hot lump of metal. Someone else pissed over my shoes, and all my Dad thought about was me becoming a doctor. What world was he living in? Every day I considered myself lucky to get home from school without serious injury. (Kureishi, *BOS* 63)

Karim wants to escape his father`s expectations of becoming a doctor, which represent the definition of achievement according to the Indian community, and also does not want to be ill-treated by white Britain because of his ethnicity. He wants neither of these worlds: "quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything" (Kureishi, *BOS* 3). However, this is not without its perils in a society that defines you according to your ethnicity. Through some characters that embody a racist perspective, Kureishi shows the reader the societal forces that keep people separated according to their ethnicity and acting according its defined roles. When Karim visits Helen, the white girl whom he meets in one of his father`s *mystic* shows at Eva`s house, he finds her father, Hairy Back, standing at the door with his dog:

> “You can’t see my daughter again,” said Hairy Back,
>
> “She doesn’t go out with the boys. Or with wogs.”
>
> “Oh well.”
>
> “Got it?”
>
> “Yeah,” I said sullenly
>
> “We don’t want you the blackies coming to the house.”
>
> “Have there been many?”
>
> “Many what, you little coon?”
>
> “Blackies.”
>
> “Where?”
>
> “Coming to the house.”
>
> “We don’t like it,” Hairy Back said. “However many niggers there are, we don’t like it. We are with Enoch. If you put one your black hands near my daughter I will smash it with an “‘ammer!’” (Kureishi, *BOS* 40)

Similarly to other British, for Hairy Back Karim is a dark, savage creature from the colonies that does not belong in white, civilized Britain because there are the white British and the rest: the ´blackies` as he calls everyone that is not white without even realising their different ethnicities. This is also the case with Pike, a theatre director, who tells Karim “we need someone from your own background . . . someone black” (Kureishi, *BOS* 170). These British only see the world in black and white and if you are not white you are black. They have no respect for peoples` differences and do not even recognize them. It seems that for them you are either one or the other, on one side of the fence or the other: the white side or the non-white, black side. Yet, the novel also shows that this social pressure of identifying with one side of the fence as opposed to the other is also exerted by Asians towards the British, which supports Berthold Schoene`s view of the novel as transcending stereotypes: at Jamila`s wedding, Helen tells Karim that one of Anwar’s relatives is acting strangely every time she walks past him and she wants to leave because of it. Once Karim asks her why she wants to leave he realises

that, “apparently whenever she’d gone close to this man, he’d shooed her away, recoiling from her and muttering, ‘pork, pork, VD, VD, white woman, white woman’” (Kureishi, *BOS* 84-85).

Another social example of the strength of British cultural hegemony in instilling false and preconceived ideas about an ethnicity that is not the white British norm takes place when Karim goes to the dentist on his first day back in England, after having a painful toothache on the flight to London:

> I walked around Chelsea, happy to be back in London. . . . It was beautiful around Cheyne Walk, those little houses smothered in flowers with blue plaques on the front wall. It was terrific as long as you didn`t have to hear the voices of the people who lived there. As the dentist`s nurse led me to the dentist`s chair and I nodded at him in greeting, he said, in a South African accent, ´Does he speak English? ` (Kureishi, *BOS* 258)

Karim finds the area lovely and loves being back in London but, albeit the scenery, in that neighbourhood he is treated based on the preconceived idea that, because he is an Indian immigrant, he probably cannot speak English. In the eyes of the locals, because they see someone so ethnically different, he is not expected to have anything in common with the white British. The dentist, himself a South African immigrant, is immersed in a culture of prejudice which he has, more or less consciously, absorbed and assumes Karim cannot speak English. The already very English dentist and his Chelsea surroundings are the embodiment of Charlie`s perspective that “they are narrow, the English. It is a Kingdom of Prejudice over there” (Kureishi, *BOS* 254). Charlie, Karim`s stepbrother, has moved to the United States and has reinvented himself as a rock n` roll star and he does not seem to identify with the British any longer. He looks at the British from outside because he does not consider himself one anymore and is very critical as one can see when Karim is witnessing Charlie having sex with a random woman: “´can`t you stop standing there and looking so English?` [Charlie says] ´What d`you mean, English?` [says Karim] ´So shocked, so self-righteous and moral, so loveless and incapable of dancing” (Kureishi, *BOS* 254). For Charlie, the English are easily shocked by difference and because they always feel self-righteous, they are easy to pass judgement on difference. So they are not able to engage in a more emotionally instinctive exchange with others, like dancing. To Karim,

Charlie`s generalization of the British echoes the racism he has already felt more or less openly (like when he is insulted by Hairy Back or the incident at the dentist`s office).

Karim finds another perfect example of racist behaviour in Gene, a very talented actor and Eleanor`s former "black lover, London`s best mime, who emptied bed-pans in hospital soaps" (Kureishi, BOS 227). He is driven to suicide because he is never given a chance to play proper roles and is forever belittled: "the police were always picking him up and giving him a going over. Taxis drove straight past him. People said there were no free tables in empty restaurants . . . every day, by a look, a remark, an attitude, the English told him they hated him; they never let him forget they thought him a nigger, a slave, a lower being" (Kureishi, *BOS* 227). Gene`s story shows that beyond the apparent inclusion of different ethnicities by British society, still lies an engrained racial discrimination, a sense of superiority the British have regarding other ethnicities inherited from colonialist discourses that does not seem to disappear: "to be truly free we had to free ourselves of all bitterness and resentment, too. How was this possible when bitterness and resentment were generated afresh every day?" (Kureishi, *BOS* 227). Karim questions if the resentments will be able to stop because ethnic minorities in Britain are continuously faced with attitudes that reveal an engrained racism towards non-white people even though, officially, they are welcome in the country: "the thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53). Despite Karim`s questioning he, however, does not feel diminished because of having Indian blood as part of his identity. He feels a sense of pride in also being Indian and wonders why he feels so strongly about his identity and why he is so resilient when faced with so much social pressure:

> I began to wonder why I was so strong – what it was that held me together. I thought it was that I`d inherited from Dad a strong survival instinct. Dad had always felt superior to the British: this was the legacy of his Indian childhood – political anger turning into scorn and contempt. For him in India the British were ridiculous, stiff, unconfident, rule-bound. And he`d made me feel that we couldn`t allow ourselves the shame of failure in front of these people. You couldn`t let the ex-colonialists see you on your knees, for that was where they expected you

> to be. They were exhausted now; their Empire was gone, their day was done and it was our turn. (Kureishi, *BOS* 250)

Karim goes beyond the fear of failure in front of ex-colonialists, and beyond the resentment for being treated badly. He evades any ethnic category: he dates and befriends people regardless of their ethnicity, listens to the music he likes (even though it is considered ´white` music) and is himself a genetic mix of two ethnicities but sometimes identifies with neither. He even befriends Eva, the white woman that is his father`s lover for a while and for whom Haroon ends up leaving his wife for. A saddened Karim sees the daily collapsing of his family until that leads to the separation of his parents because of Eva, a woman in which he sees "where Charlie [Eva`s son] may have inherited some of his cruelty" (Kureishi, *BOS* 93). However, he also reveals he sees many qualities in her: "this woman I barely knew, Eva, had stolen my father . . . she had no conventional beauty . . . but she was lovely . . . her face registered the slightest feeling, concealing little . . . she could be pretty serious and honest (Kureishi, *BOS* 86) and is "a shrewd boss too" (Kureishi, *BOS* 112). In Eva he sees someone interesting and someone that leads him to ponder on the difference between good people and interesting people and concludes that "there were the nice people who weren`t interesting . . . like Mum, they were good and meek and deserved more love. But it was the interesting ones, like Eva with her hard, taking edge, who ended up with everything, and in bed with my father" (Kureishi, *BOS* 93). Karim acknowledges that people have their nuances and they are not black or white and, while he loves his mother and does not like to see her suffer with the separation from her husband, he also recognises that Eva is honest and interesting. He moves past the sadness of the situation because he cherishes the cultural information she brings to his life: "she`d explain to me the origin of the Paisley pattern; . . . Notting Hill Gate, the use of a camera obscura by Vermeer, why Charles Lamb`s sister murdered their mother, and a history of Tamla Motown. I loved this stuff . . . Eva was unfolding the world for me. It was through her that I became interested in life" (Kureishi, *BOS* 87).

Hence, Karim finds her perspective matters and he likes to know her opinions about everything: "Eva could be snobby . . . but if I saw something, or heard a piece of music, or visited a place, I wouldn`t be content until Eva had made me see it in a certain way. She came at things from an angle" (Kureishi, *BOS* 93). Karim welcomes the opinions of those who are different and, not only does Karim relate to people regardless

of their ethnicity, but he also does not allow ethnicity to define his identity. Further: as an actor, he is no longer just two, but while also plays other ethnicities, he gets to be anything/anyone he wants. Just how disconcerting such fluidity is can be seen in Shadwell`s comment when the theatre director and Karim talk to each other:

> ´What a breed of people to two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there'd be. Everyone looks at you, I am sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him. And you're from Orpington`. (Kureishi, *BOS* 141)

Shadwell does not feel comfortable with the social change in England due to the presence of so many immigrants: "´what a strange world. The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century. Yes?" (Kureishi, *BOS* 141). When Shadwell finds out Karim is living with his father in Eva`s house he goes on to say that "she's trying to protect you from your destiny, which is to be a half-caste in England" (Kureishi, *BOS* 141). As if Karim is in such a miserable position for being an Asian in England that he needs rescue and Eva, a white English woman, is being so kind to introduce him to British society. Shadwell continues to, quite insistently, have Karim admit to suffering due to his ethnic background: "–That must be complicated for you to accept – belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere. Racism. Do you find difficult? Please tell me`" (Kureishi, *BOS* 141). He seems to expect nothing good or positive from ethnic hybridity. As if only bad things could come out of such circumstance and he takes some pleasure in making Karim admit it while the latter just wants to talk about acting: "´Don't you know?` he persisted. Don't you really?` . . . I was shaking with embarrassment that he could talk to me in this way at all; as if he knew me, as if he had the right to question me" (Kureishi, *BOS* 141). Shadwell seems to feel somewhat threatened by Karim`s hybrid identity of half Indian and half white, because he cannot clearly identify his ethnicity. For Shadwell Karim looks Indian, African, or any other racial mix he cannot pinpoint.

Throughout the novel Kureishi accentuates the themes of performance and fabrication in relation to the creation of personal identities: Eva stages the apartment and herself, Eleanor pretends to be lower middle class, Charlie plays the rock and roll star, Karim plays Mowgli and his father pretends to be a guru. Being interviewed about

the flat for *Furnishings* magazine, Eva stages the apartment in order to publicise it for selling and stages herself along, creating a guru like identity that seems based on Haroon`s role as a guru. Karim`s description of the staging of the flat and photographs reinforces the idea of Eva`s new identity as something also artificially created (a performance), an opportunity for the "businesslike" (Kureishi, *BOS* 261) Eva to "dominate" (Kureishi, *BOS* 263) and, instead of just listening to Haroon, affirm her very own ´philosophy`:

> the photographer rearranged the furniture and photographed objects only in the places where they had not been initially positioned. He photographed Eva only in poses which she found uncomfortable and in which she looked unnatural. . . . ´My philosophy of life. ` . . . Eva was confident and proud and calm. She had plenty to say . . . She had a world-view, though ´paradigm` would be a word she`d favour. . . . I am beginning to feel I can do anything – with the aid of techniques like meditation, self-awareness and yoga. Perhaps a little chanting to slow the mind down. You see, I have come to believe in self-help, individual initiative, the love of what you do, and the full development of all individuals. I am constantly disappointed by how little we expect of ourselves and of the world. ` . . . ´We have to empower ourselves. Look at those people who live on sordid housing estates. They expect others – the Government _ to do everything for them. They are only half human, because only half active. We have to find a way to enable them to grow. Individual human flourishing isn`t something that either socialism or conservatism caters for. ` The journalist nodded at Eva. Eva smiled at her. But Eva hadn`t finished; more thoughts were occurring to her . . . the tape was running . . . she just wanted to continue developing her theme . . . ´I think I _` she began . . . (Kureishi, *BOS* 262-263)

In order to fit in with the theatre crowd, Eleanor tries to make them think she is lower middle class instead of a privileged banker`s daughter who "had been to country houses, to public school and Italy . . . and she knew . . . painters, novelists, lecturers . . . [and] her mother [who drives a Bentley] was a friend of the Queen Mother" (Kureishi, *BOS* 173). She swears often, dresses poorly, and sometimes talks with a different, less upper-class accent. Charlie changes his appearance and demeanour in order to get noticed and

to try to be taken seriously among rock fans, and together with his band, they have "thrown out everything of their former existence – their hair, clothes, music. They were unrecognizable . . . Charlie was magnificent in his venom, his manufactured rage, his anger, his defiance . . . He was brilliant: he`d assembled the right elements. It was a wonderful trick and disguise" (Kureishi, *BOS* 154). Karim describes Charlie not as someone with an unchangeable identity, but as if he is referring to an actor doing a performance of a created identity. Charlie keeps reinventing himself even after fame in the United States and changes his accent and way of talking: "here in America Charlie had acquired this cockney accent when my first memory of him at school was that he`d cried after being mocked by the stinking gypsy kids for talking so posh" (Kureishi, *BOS* 247). Charlie feels he fits well in America, which he depicts as a land of endless opportunities for reinvention and when Karim tells him that he wants to go back to England Charlie explains that: "´England`s decrepit. No one believes in anything. Here, it`s money and success. But people are motivated. They do things. England`s a nice place if you`re rich, but otherwise it`s a fucking swamp of prejudice, class confusion, the whole thing`" (Kureishi, *BOS* 256). Charlie embodies the pioneers that leave England for the new land of America to escape the oppression and totalitarian discourses of British society with the hope of reinventing themselves. For Charlie the cultural pressure England exerts on individual identity is still against reinvention, hence he prefers the freedom the USA gives him to recreate himself anew.

Amidst the recreations of identities is Anwar`s, which is Kureishi`s way of addressing how easily religious metanarratives are used for personal interests. Anwar does no longer identify with a British identity and feels the need to assert his authority and to compensate for his alienation from British society he turns to Islam. Although never a devout believer, he tries to reconstruct an identity around Islamic rules and Indian values in order to create an identity that identifies with Asian culture. Anwar starts suddenly visiting a mosque and, to make the point that this is not about faith or spirituality but a performative act, Karim humorously describes the place as a smelly, crumbling terraced house with onion skins all over the floor near his home. He complaints that Allah has abandoned him because he expected that, because he no longer frequents the prostitutes of Hyde Park, his wishes would be granted. After a while realising that a Muslim identity does not solve his problems he returns to smoking and drinking himself into alcoholic comas. His Islamic practice is devoid of spirituality

as it is just an opportunistic take on religion that shows how religious metanarratives can serve personal purposes. Recreating his own personal identity is also Karim, who is not that attached to his ethnical heritage and does not seem to mind (neither he nor his father) playing with westerners` misconceptions about Indian culture for his own benefit. The one time Karim slightly reclaims belonging (partly) to a determined ethnicity (Indian) happens as his way to justify to his mother being cast as an Indian. After one of the shows in Pyke's theatre there is a humorous moment in which his mother deconstructs Karim`s pretentions of being Indian and he reaffirms that he does not really care about ethnicity, all he wants is to act:

> I was leaving; I was getting out, when Mum came up to me. She smiled and I kissed her. "I love you so much," she said.
>
> "Wasn't I good, eh, Mum?"
>
> You weren't in a loincloth as usual," she said. "At least they let you wear your own clothes. But you are not an Indian. You have never been to India. You'd get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would."
>
> "Why don't you say it a bit louder," I said. "Aren't I part Indian?"
>
> "What about me?" Mum said. "Who gave birth to you? You're an English man, I am glad to say..."
>
> "I don't care," I said. I'm an actor. It's a job."
>
> "Don't say that," she said. "Be what you are."
>
> "Oh yeah." (Kureishi, *BOS* 232)

When he thinks of himself as an Indian because his father is Indian, his mother states that he is English because he is born of an English woman, has lived in England and has never even gone to India. She is so assured of Karim`s Englishness that she believes he would react to India much like other foreigners: he would get diarrhoea. Karim`s mother disregards his father`s side and states that he is British because he is her Britain raised son which she is trying to pull towards herself and away from her estranged husband, so she does not accept any other identity for him. This seems to be a good example that

national affiliation/identity is a creation that can be redefined at any given moment and for various motives that go from personal to political reasons (such as the British Nationality Act, which redefines nationality by abolishing the automatic right to British citizenship for babies born in Britain and is drawn by the time Kureishi is writing the novel). Karim justifies himself by explaining he is an actor and just like Karim chooses the art of representation, so it seems Kureishi sides with the creative freedom to represent characters regardless of their ethnicity. *The Buddha of Suburbia* sets itself apart from the responsibility of representing a whole ethnic group in a positive light (or the burden of representation) hence all characters are depicted as having both positive and negative traits.

Karim himself, as an actor, is depicted as someone who engages in forms of cultural racism against Asians particularly Indian people. When working on an acting piece to be presented at the theatre he decides to use Changez as a model for his role: "at night, at home, I was working on Changez's shambolic walk and crippled hand, and on the accent, which I knew would sound, to white ears, bizarre, funny and characteristic of India" (Kureishi, *BOS* 188-189). He knows he is exaggerating some of Changez`s characteristics and that, by doing so, he is only turning his character into the caricature white people expect. But he feels he must have the artistic freedom to construct a caricature of an Indian character instead of the responsibility to represent a whole culture. On the other end, Jamila`s horror when she assists one of Karim`s plays exemplifies the perspective that art does have the responsibility to represent a whole culture and she wants to see Indians represented in a positive manner. The director of the theatrical adaptation of *The Jungle Book*, in which Karim plays Mowgli, tells him that he has been "cast for authenticity" (Kureishi, *BOS* 147), but, in Jamila`s words it is "disgusting, the accent and the shit you had smeared over you. You were just pandering to prejudices . . . clichés about Indians. And the accent— my God, how could you do it?" (Kureishi, *BOS* 157). Through Karim`s performance of Shadwell`s racial stereotypes which demonstrate a neo-colonial view, Kureishi seems to ridicule the artificial expectations the British have regarding other ethnicities. What they want to see and consider authentic is, in fact, a stereotype, a social performance that consists of someone playing the role white British people expect to see. As Graham Huggan explains in his study *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*:

> Minorities are encouraged, in some cases obliged, to stage their racial/ethnic identities in keeping with white stereotypical perceptions of an exotic cultural other. Yet as Kureishi makes clear, such stagings can be seen on one level as parodies of white expectations and, on another, as demonstrations of the performative basis of all identity formation. (95)

Hybridity challenges these stereotypes sustained by British society and destroys the concept of race as a definite construct making it easier for characters like Karim or Haroon to recreate their identities. In fact, in order to access higher social classes and demand some influence, Karim's father Haroon is encouraged by his mistress, Eva Kay, to perform himself into a new identity by playing the role of a guru. Or "a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist" (Kureishi, *BOS* 16) in Karim`s words. Karim helps Haroon construct the basis of his fake spiritual ´philosophy` via English books on Eastern philosophies and self-help manuals: "I ran and fetched Dad's preferred yoga book . . . from among his other books on Buddhism, Sufism, Confucianism and Zen which he had bought at the Oriental bookshop in Cecil Court, off Charing Cross Road" (Kureishi, *BOS* 5). They are satirically recreating his guru identity based on English perspectives on Asian philosophy. And suddenly the man who has been in England for over twenty years "yet still [. . .] stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat, [. . .] [and] halted strangers in the street to ask directions to places that were a hundred yards away in an area where he`d lived for almost two decades" (Kureishi, *BOS* 7), and is "unable to work out the London bus routes . . . [professes] the path to true enlightenment" (Kureishi, *BOS* 78):

> The room was still and silent. Dad went into a silence too, looking straight ahead of him. At first it was a little silence. But on and on it went, becoming a big silence: nothing was followed by nothing, which was followed quite soon by more nothing as he sat there, his eyes fixed but full of care. My head started to sweat. Bubbles of laughter rose in my throat. I wondered if he were going to con them and sit there for an hour in silence . . . before putting his car coat on and tramping off back to his wife, having brought the Chislehurst bourgeoisie to an exquisite understanding of their inner emptiness. Would he dare? (Kureishi, *BOS* 35)

These identity performances seem to, at least sometimes, come with a price. Karim looks at the dynamics of his father`s new life (his new identity as a guru, his new relationship with a white woman, the new place he lives in) and concludes that it is his mother the one that pays the price for his father`s reinvention:

> watching this, I was developing my own angry theories of love. Surely love had to be something more generous than this high-spirited egotism-à-deux? In their hands love seemed a narrow-eyed, exclusive, selfish bastard, to enjoy itself at the expense of a woman who now lay in bed in Auntie Jean`s house, her life unconsidered. Mum`s wretchedness was the price Dad had chosen to pay for his happiness. How could he have done it? (Kureishi, *BOS* 116)

But, again, Kureishi adds some nuances to this character and reveals a sad reinvention story of an Indian who acts in a reproachable manner just like the white characters albeit for different reasons and in a different manner. So Karim realises that his father will forever pay for his reinvention through constant feelings of remorse and guilt for having abandoned his wife which:

> lay on him like water on a tin roof, rusting and rotting and corroding day after day. And though he was never to make such almost innocent remarks again, and though Eva and Dad continued to want to make love all the time, and I caught her giggling while she did idiotic things with him, like snipping the hair in his ears and nostrils with a huge pair of scissors, there were looks that escaped all possible policing, looks that made me think he was capable only of a corrupted happiness . . . Dad didn`t speak to Mum on the phone, and he didn`t see her, knowing that this was for the best in the long run. Yet he had photographs of her in every jacket pocket, and they fell out of books at the wrong time and upset Eva." (Kureishi, *BOS* 117)

Yet, although Haroon pays a price for his reinvention, Karim, who is the most transgressive, does not. Karim seems to embody Kureishi`s defence of identity as something fluid because, in his own words: "How could anyone confine themselves to one system . . . ? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in

the world" (Kureishi, *Black Album* 274). The characters of Karim and Haroon do not assume an Indian or British identity, or even a mix of the two, but they advocate a creative way of expressing their hybridity. Karim`s sexual identity escapes a defined classification and he chooses to play different ethnicities, and Karim`s father, escapes the Indian-British dichotomy by choosing to pretend to be a Buddhist guru. This hybridity of the *Buddha of Suburbia*`s characters (their play with the creation of shifting sexual, cultural and racial identities) goes against the established norm as it refuses to place its characters within one exclusive group. Not following the beliefs and behaviour norms of a determined group gives them the freedom to pick and choose what they are and be critical of anything they want. For example, because they do not have set identities as either Indian or British, both Karim and his father are free to be accepting of certain things from either culture and are also free to be critical of what they dislike about either culture. Similarly, this perspective of identity as something fluid is also fundamental in *Midnight`s Children*.

Being set in Bombay, a city which is a hybrid of young and old, past and present, with its religious diversity of Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Christian, and social caste differences, reinforces the idea of identity as hybrid and unstable. The true ´authentic` culture the inhabitants of Bombay attribute to the city and which creates their unique identity as Bombayites, does not exist. Saleem`s account of how the "Kolis . . . caught pomfret and crabs, and made fish-lovers of us all" (Rushdie, *MC* 121) reveals that there are no authentic Indian peoples, because the characteristic of being fish-lovers of Bombay inhabitants is not an attribute of the indigenous people of Bombay, but a characteristic that comes from early Bombay's colonizers, the Kolis. Through this reveal that the apparently typical Bombay characteristic of loving seafood comes instead from Bombay's early invaders due to the constant contact and influence between different cultural groups, Rushdie explores the idea that cultural authenticity is flawed and impossible to define because there are no authentic cultures. The novel`s critique of the pure origins of national identity undermines the cultural segregation established by the British colonizer because it reveals all cultures as more or less hybrid, an amalgam of different cultural influences. Adding to the fact that the novel`s setting alone illustrates the impossibility of categorizing and determining cultural identity as authentic, Saleem seems to prove Pradip Kumar Dey`s view in *Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children*, that the idea of a fixed identity does not work. The theorist`s

perspective is that identity is defined by one`s environment and because Saleem is a migrant (keeps voyaging throughout India in his mind through his telepathic ability) he has no solid basis to construct an identity from and so he is a rootless hybrid without a defined identity (88-95). It is through Saleem that the readers realize just how deeply rooted and complex is defining self-identity:

> Even a baby is faced with the problem of defining itself; and I'm bound to say that my early popularity had its problematic aspects, because I was bombarded with a confusing multiplicity of views on the subject, being a Blessed One to a guru . . . a rival . . . [and] to my two-headed mother I was all kinds of babyish things. (Rushdie, *MC* 178)

Saleem Sinai`s identity, which at times seems a dissociative experience during which he refers to himself in the third person: "I must doggedly insist that I, he, had begun again; that after years of yearning for importance, he (or I)" (Rushdie, *MC* 488), is, not only beyond ambiguous all throughout the novel, but it is rooted in uncertainty. It is difficult for him to even recognize that his view of his physical self (an important marker of identity) is distorted by his own ideas about himself and he describes his appearance with a certain degree of detachment, as if he is talking about someone else:

> It took me a little while to realize that my picture of myself was heavily distorted by my own self-consciousness about my appearance; so that the portrait I sent across the thought-waves of the nation, grinning like a Cheshire cat, was about as hideous as a portrait could be, featuring a wondrously enlarged nose, a completely non-existent chin and giant stains on each temple. It's no wonder that I was often greeted by yelps of mental alarm. (Rushdie, *MC* 304)

His detachment from his physical marker of identity, his body (which apart from blood ties and name is the marker that traditionally relates us to family) parallels the results of Sajad Ganie`s analysis in "The Characters with Lost Identity in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Chidren and Shame". His study of Saleem Sinai approaches the theme of lost identity and explains that the characters who do not know who their parents are either suffer a complete amnesia or lose the notion of their selves (32). And for the

reader it sometimes feels that Saleem is lost. Indeed, his rootless identity leads him to lose his memory. After losing his memory, Saleem is drafted into the army of Pakistan and participates in the war against Bangladesh`s independence. Amid this experience he decides to desert and flees to the Sundarbans jungle where he gets lost and questions the glorification of war heroes. He questions official motives and the official historiography: "Shaheed and I saw many things that were not true, which were not possible, because our boys would not could not have behaved so badly; we saw men in spectacles with heads like eggs being shot in side-streets, we saw the intelligentsia of the city being massacred by the hundred, but it was not true because it could not have been true" (Rushdie, *MC* 524). He questions the discourses of the powers that be and how they bring nothing but conflict which he does not identify with. Paralleling Ganie`s view that the characters who do not know who their parents are or have no strong family roots are lost in a constant search for an identity (32), Saleem is, throughout most of the novel, lost because he cannot construct an identity based on his roots: Saleem does not identify with the physical traits he inherits from his family, he is illuded as to who his parents are and when he thinks it is a couple he finds out that it is another and that leaves him feeling rootless. Family, (parents, more precisely) are fundamental in the creation of an identity, and Saleem doesn`t reveal strong, solid, well determined familiar roots. Saleem`s identity is rooted in fragmentation hence the chapter in which he narrates the story of his birth is titled "The Perforated Sheet". In it he tells how this fragmentation goes back to when his grandfather meets his grandmother. He gets to know her through a tiny hole in a sheet which is used for the medical exam and every week he gets to see another fragment of her. So his grandfather has a hybrid identity as an Europe educated Indian man and his grandmother`s identity is fragmented in many tiny pieces hence Saleem feels he has inherited their hybridity and fragmentation. He feels "condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments" (Rushdie, MC 165). Regarding his parents, he seems to be the offspring of some undetermined ethnic mix. He makes the reader believe Ahmed and Amina Sinai are his parents by giving a detailed account of their life and adventures but, it becomes clear, however, that they are not his parents. At the time of his birth the nurse Mary Pereira swaps Saleem and another midnight`s child: Shiva. It seems that Saleem is the offspring of the poor Vanita and her affair with an English man by the name of William Methwold. So Saleem is actually the son of a Hindu street singer's seduced wife and a departing British colonial Sahib which is a descendant of a founder

of the British East India Company. This parental mess seems to be Rushdie`s way of exposing a defined identity as an illusion and Saleem questions and plays with his identity constantly and is quite aware of having a different identity that has nothing to do with his parents` even before knowing about the baby switch.

Even Saleem`s body is a living representation of hybridity as he seems to be a creature of an undetermined ethnicity. Saleem "suffers from the 'presence' of conflicting colours or race markers in his body" (Abu Baker 92) because he has the brown skin of an Indian and yet, light blue eyes, a characteristic of other ethnicities. This is both puzzling and frightening as revealed by Farooq who calls Saleem a "freak with … blue eyes of a foreigner" (Rushdie, *MC* 515). It seems like even his body transcends a defined racial identity and one cannot define or label Saleem as a foreigner, a Pakistani, or an Indian. Saleem disrupts any shred of a stable and defined identity: even his genetic inheritance is a bit uncertain. So much so that even blood, culturally seen as an inheritance that is fundamental in defining one`s identity, reveals he is not who everyone (including himself) think he is: when, one day, Saleem cuts off the top of his middle finger in an accident and is rushed to the hospital, his parents find out that according to Saleem's blood type, he couldn't possibly be their biological son. Identity wise, Rushdie uses blood, not as a symbol for a certainty in one`s identity as to be expected, but as a reinforcement for continuous change. Hence, blood is "spilled in the circus-ring" (Rushdie, *MC* 313) as it appears as a metaphor for the moments when characters shed or redefine identities. Saleem`s grandfather Aadam Aziz hits his nose on the ground when, while praying, he is thinking about what he has been taught in Germany and how it conflicts with what he has learned in Indian culture:

> Forward he bent, and the earth, prayer-mat-covered, curved up towards him. [. . .] At one and the same time a rebuke from Ilse-Oskar ingrid-Heidelberg as well as valley-and-God, it smote him upon the point of the nose. Three drops fell. There were rubies [. . .]. And my grandfather . . . was knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve. Permanent alteration: a hole. (Rushdie, *MC* 7)

His bleeding marks the moment he feels his identity has changed yet again to something undetermined further in an in-between state that he already feels he is part of after recreating an identity as Doctor Aziz during his studies in Germany. Also, at Amritsar, Aadam develops a permanent bruise (an haemorrhagic flow of blood from broken capillaries into surrounding tissues for the rest of his life), which, as he explains, helps marks his identity change from a Kashmiri to identifying as an Indian: "I started off as a Kashmiri . . . then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian (Rushdie, *MC* 47). It is also through this bloody incident that Rushdie reveals the fictional character of narratives of origin. Saleem goes back in history to disclose the origins of some personal and historical events, the origin of names or nicknames or even the names of cities, the story of his family, his origins as a human being, his genetic origins. He talks about determined facial features and what he thinks are their origin: he mostly refers to his huge nose which he thinks he has inherited from his grandfather Aadam. According to Kortenaar`s study *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children"*, the novel reveals narratives of origin are fabricated, imagined, fictional because there is no clear origin, so someone like Saleem who is telling the story of his/her origin will (even unknowingly) appropriate himself/herself of the story of others (183-185). Saleem comes to a point in which he tells he has realized he is not his parents` biological son and thus the facial features, like his prominent nose, do not come from them. Without knowing it, he misappropriates his family`s history as it is not his own. All those stories about similarities between himself and his family members do not have a truthful origin. This discovery seems to give Saleem a greater ease in accepting his identity as something that is not set from the start of his physical origin and, therefore, is something fluid, changeable. Rushdie seems to play with the idea of identity being determined by biology (blood). A perfect example of this occurs when Saleem tells Jamila (his supposed sister) of his "unspeakable (and also unrequited)" (Rushdie, *MC* 458) not-so-brotherly-love for her. Saleem professes his love for her, but all her life she has known him to be her brother and she is horrified, so they start to avoid each other "as much as possible" (Rushdie, *MC* 458), until Saleem realizes that the fact that they are not blood related does not change the fact that, for her, he *is* her brother. Blood ties do not define their identities as brother and sister. And when Saleem reveals Padma that he has been switched at birth she is shocked and feels she no longer knows Saleem`s identity: " ´An Anglo?` Padma exclaims in horror. ´What are you telling me? You are an Anglo-Indian? Your name is not your own?` ´I am Saleem Sinai,` I told her,

´Snotnose, Stainface, Sniffer, Baldy, Piece-of-the-Moon. Whatever do you mean-not my own? `" (Rushdie, *MC* 158). For Padma the main two defining markers of identity are blood (Saleem`s ancestry) and name (also a mark of ancestry and blood connections).

Rushdie depicts one`s name (a marker of identity) as something changeable, subjected to cultural or political forces and also a personal tool subjected to the ebb and flow of creative moods by many of the novel`s characters. The name of the city itself, Bombay, which is associated with the "benign residing influence of the goddess Mumbadevi, whose name — Mumbadevi, Mumbabai, Mumbai — may well have become the city's" (Rushdie, *MC* 121-122) is questioned because of the influence of the Portuguese. A characteristic of the colonial process due to the colonizers` attempt to impose control over their colonized lands, the renaming of places is of significant importance and the city`s name, Bombay, seems to be the result of two colonizing forces: "the Portuguese named the place Bom Bhaia for its harbour, and not for the goddess of the pomfret folk" (Rushdie, *MC* 122) and later the British made their own anglicized interpretation of ´Bom Bhai` and renamed it ´Bombay`. The very narrator, Saleem Sinai, forgets his own name for a while at a time when he regrets some of his actions because he seems to want to ditch the identity that carried out those actions to assume another. Saleem explains that he is "variously called Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, . . . and even Piece-of-the-Moon" (Rushdie, MC 3) and becomes known as Buddha when he joins the army and refuses to acknowledge anything from his old identity saying: "´I am who I am, that`s all there is`" (Rushdie, *MC* 489). Saleem`s supposed sister, known for her nickname of Brass Monkey (whose nickname may link her intelligence and her passion for fire, with an ancient myth of the Bororo Indians which describes the monkey as a civilizing hero that discovers the fire) throughout the novel, only assumes the name of Jamila Singer after becoming a singer. After which it seems that the identity Brass Monkey disappears as if it were a different person altogether and Jamila Singer has only "one passion in common with the vanished Brass Monkey; . . . bread" (Rushdie, *MC* 438). Nussie Ibrahim, Ismail's wife, is nicknamed Nussie The Duck because of the way she walks. Saleem`s own mother, and the daughter of Aadam Aziz, is born Mumtaz but she changes her name to Amina after her marriage to Ahmed. Perhaps to leave behind a life discrimination by her own mother or to forget

her first husband, Nadir Khan, who later on changes his name to Qasim Khan to embrace a whole new identity as a communist, she changes her name in order to change the course of her life, so she gives up one identity for the discovery of another. Saleem`s listener Padma, (sanskrit for born out of the lotus) changes her name in order to assume the identity of wife and becomes Naseem "in the honour of Reverend Mother`s watching ghost" (Rushdie, *MC* 645).

The novel`s characters display the idea that naming creates identity and, because identity is fluid, so is naming as easy as the mere desire for a new start: "´change your name, ` Ahmed Sinai said. ´Time for a fresh start`" (Rushdie, *MC* 81). About his birth name, Saleem refers to it as "the accident of transliteration- Sinai when in Roman script . . . is also the name of the place of revelation, of puttoff-thy-shoes, of commandments and golden calves" (Rushdie, *MC* 423). The same name has different meanings according to those interpreting it since Mount Sinai is one of the most important sacred places for Islamic, Christian and Jewish religions. The etymology of the name itself is not established and Saleem acknowledges the indeterminacy in the name *Sinai* as one name can be perceived as having many identities. Mount Sinai itself derives its name from the fact that it is part of a territory known as the Sinai desert and Saleem reinforces a connection between the desert and his name by stating that: "´no matter how I try, the desert is my lot`" (Rushdie, *MC* 551). Such connection between the desert and his identity (his name) can be explained by the fact that the desert is thought of as a sort of a liminal space, a clean slate, a place of possibilities open to creativity and play, of

> nothingness waiting to become something; . . . space without contours, ready to accept any contour offered, if only until other contours are offered; . . . space not scarred with past furrows, yet fertile with expectations . . . ; . . . the land of the perceptual beginning; . . . the place-no-place whose name and identity is not-yet. (Bauman 21)

Add to this the fact that Saleem, regarding his name, explains that "Sinai contains Ibn Sina, master magician . . . [and] Sin is also the letter S, as sinuous as a snake" (Rushdie, *MC* 423), and one perceives a view of personal identity, not as fixed characteristic, but

as an openness to endless possibilities. The Muslim scholar Ibn Sina is renowned for excelling in everything he decides to dedicate himself to (be it medicine, philosophy, logic, physics or metaphysics), and as a magician there are further possibilities to create anything. The possibility for reinvention seems to be brought on by the figure of the snakes that shed their skin all throughout their lives to allow for continued growth. This indetermination allows Saleem to describe himself as someone "who lives both in-the-world and not-in-the-world" (Rushdie, *MC* 496). This uncertain mesh of everything and everyone that Saleem uses to describe his identity translates into Saleem`s particular situation as a midnight`s child.

Saleem`s midnight birth and the deep entanglement between his personal identity and national identity (he is born at the exact time of India`s independence), seem to lead readers to agree with theorist Julian Droogan`s conclusion that identity is also a product of history (208-209) because it is through his perception of past events that Saleem forms his hybrid identity. Following the similar view of M. K. Naik ("A Life of Fragments: The Fate of Identity in Midnight`s Children"), who studies the identity fragmentation of every generation of Saleem`s family, a reading of the novel confirms that, for its characters, identity is something undefined that is influenced by everything and everyone else including history itself (54). Saleem is born at the liminal hour of midnight "which is reserved for miracles, which is somehow outside time" (Rushdie, *MC* 294-295). It marks the passage of one day into another. It is no longer the day that has ended but it is not the day to come yet. Or, it is, perhaps, a bit of both. For Saleem this freedom of liminality is the "true hope of freedom . . . [and must be a reality for midnight`s children] must not become . . . the bizarre creation of a rambling, diseased mind" (Rushdie, *MC* 278). Here liminality is presented as freedom from the concepts or rules that dictate that people must be within a binary: be one thing or the other, identify with the either the Asian or British culture. Saleem is one of the one thousand and one born at midnight on the exact moment India gained its independence. Described as possibilities, these children can also be interpreted as one thousand different critical voices or alter-identities of his self which start to manifest in Saleem`s mind: "within the dark auditorium of my skull, my nose began to sing" (Rushdie, *MC* 224). As a consequence of this otherness, he soon starts to develop these powers of telepathy and feels as if he has other people inside his head: "by sunrise I had

discovered that the voices could be controlled- I was a radio receiver, and could turn the volume down and up; I could select individual voices; I could even, by an effort of will, switch off my newly-discovered inner-ear" (Rushdie, *MC* 226). Saleem`s identity in *Midnight`s Children* seems to be an example of the potential power of pluralism and coexisting diversity. The hybridity of various cultural identities present with ethnic pluralism subverts cultural hegemony because hybridity shatters the discourse of colonial authority by ensuring that other points of view enter the dominant discourse challenging its authority. Hence how the hybridity displayed in the novel can act as resistance to colonial discourse.

Concluding the analysis of identity, more precisely ethnic/cultural identity in both novels, this dissertation reveals how the main characters of both novels dare to escape assigned roles (enforced by societal forces that keep people within certain norms) by experimenting with recreating identities, embracing their hybrid mix of two ethnicities and going beyond it by identifying with neither and creating, instead, an identity according to one`s desires at a given moment. And both writers reveal just how subversive this is. Because they dare to recreate identities outside a specific cultural influence they suffer various attacks: in *The Buddha of Suburbia* Karim is insulted by the English working class man in the form of Hairy Back, by people with some decisive and creative power in the form of Shadwell, the theatre director, and by the English educational system as he is verbally and physically attacked at school, and in *Midnight`s Children* this is expressed through the ruthless persecution of the gifted midnight's children by an Indian state that inherits the coercive discourse of British cultural hegemony. *The Buddha of Suburbia* the identity play shows Kureishi's novel goes beyond ethnic literature and beyond the stereotypes of oppressor versus oppressed by caricaturizing both Indian and British characters and not demonizing one in favour of the other (despite the racial attacks, dating white women merely for revenge and being satirically critical of the British people, Karim is capable of befriending white people and caricaturizing Indian friend Changez for his theatrical experiment despite hurting his feelings) and playing with expectations (the novel ridicules British expectations regarding non-white people through Indian characters like Karim and Haroon who take advantage and play with the British upper class` expectations for personal profit while Indian actor, Karim, also performs stereotypical identities in order to parody the expectations of the British). Similarly, *Midnight`s Children* depicts identity as

something fluid and unstable by depicting identity markers such as blood and name as unreliable and to, ultimately, be less responsible for identity than commonly believed, and Saleem even embodies the theme of lost identity only to reveal how this feeling of being lost in the Sundarbans jungle permits a critique of political affairs. Saleem`s ability of getting in other bodies, the name changes to reinvent one`s identity and the make belief blood ties, show how the novel conveys the perspective that there is no such thing as one definite identity. That what one thinks is a definite identity is the result of innumerous factors that contribute to what a person (or even a city) is in a determinate moment so there are no authentic identities even regarding a city`s identity. Yet it treats the subject of identity in a different manner. It establishes a connection between personal and national identity and history only to expose a critical view of metanarratives. The novel`s connection between identity and history reveals the author`s view of the general lack of a critical perspective. Particularly on the nature of cultural and national identity in the postcolonial era. The novel reveals that, although some people still have a critical stance, most are accepting of the values inherited from British cultural hegemony. When Saleem compares his grandfather`s generation to his own, one sees how accepting of western values Indian society has become. Hence this treatment of the subject of ethnic/cultural identity depicted in the novels as something fluid, inconstant and even undefined or hybrid defies totalizing discourses established by colonial hegemony.

1.1 Gender Identity and Hybridity

This portrayal of identity as something fluid is exemplified in the relevance both novels seem to give gender identity. Regarding identity and gender, this section explores Judith Butler`s theoretical concept of a performative identity. In *Undoing Gender* Butler arguments that gender is a social norm (41) established by society`s power structures in order to regulate and condition behavior (53). She arguments that, although the norms have the power to define gender and its social roles (42), because it is nothing but an allowed performance, the performative character of norm also makes subversion possible: “to the extent that gender norms are reproduced, they are invoked and cited by bodily practices that also have the capacity to alter norms in the course of

their citation" (52). People can either conform to performing a society`s gender identity norm (acting accordingly to what that society expects regarding their gender) or perform their gender identity according to their own wishes and be subversive of the norm. This is why, for Butler, performativity can call norms into question (218) and why her concept of the performativity of gender identity is applied to the interpretation of the novels to reveal the illusory character of gender roles. Other relevant theoretical perspectives include Wendy O`Shea-Meddour who, in her article "The Politics of Imagining the Other in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*", states that there are some critical points that have yet to be properly discussed because they have been continuously overlooked: masculinity and the representation of the Islam and of women. The author also analyses all the other characters that she believes to have been unfairly considered auxiliary although they are just as hybrid, disruptive and important for the novel's critical debate (39). Regarding the subject of gender, critics like Elahe Yekani whose work *The Privilege of Crisis: Narratives of Masculinities in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, Photography and Film* analyses how the novel's male characters hybrid display of gender defies both predominant and marginal masculinities (28-36), focus their identity studies on sexuality. Nahem Yousaf`s research in *Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia: A reader's Guide* shows how British hegemony has (almost) no regard for the various ethnic minorities and their own cultural differences and how the women in a Muslim family (Jamila and her mother) are, in fact, quite free and only apparently submit to the patriarchal structure of the family. He finds they are more than the authoritarian father, the long-suffering submissive wife, and the sad victim of an arranged marriage: this is the popular caricature the British have of the Muslim family (42-43). In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* Ania Loomba shows how colonialism leads to patriarchy and the oppression of women (128-145) which this study interprets as being reflected in the characters of Jamila and Anwar. Loomba`s perspective on the influence of colonialism on the colonized man is approached to explain Anwar`s oppression of his wife and daughter Jamila. And in *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writings from South Asia*, Neluka Silva focuses her research on the subject of gender identity, the role of gender within the cultural and religious context of Midnight's Children based on the identities of Saleem and the Widow and how society politicizes gender roles (46-58). She explains how The Widow clearly refers to Indira Gandhi and how she constructs her gender role to fit her political purposes.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* Karim seems to create a fluid sexual identity that is tailored to his desire of the moment. Liminal. It exists outside any cultural influence, and confuses both English and Indian cultures because they attribute sexuality to gender roles: if you are heterosexual (the accepted norm) you are attracted to the opposite sex. At the most, these cultures recognize your homosexuality. Bisexuality is seen as a threat, possibly because of the freedom it gives Karim to construct his identity as he pleases:

> It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls. I liked strong bodies and the backs of boys' necks. I liked being handled by men, their fists pulling me; and I liked objects—the ends of brushes, pens, fingers—up my arse. But I liked cunts and breasts, all of women's softness, long smooth legs and the way women dressed. I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. (Kureishi, *BOS* 55)

Karim`s sexual ambiguity is troubling because it breaks the mold of what society has decided is acceptable (being heterosexual) or unacceptable (being homosexual): with his love for both women and men he is something unclear and in the middle, entirely out of the box. This makes him wonder whether he is a "pervert and needed to have treatment, hormones, or electric shocks through [his] brain" (Kureishi, *BOS* 55) because he cannot decide for one gender over the other. His sexuality is disruptive to others because, in a society where you are either the heterosexual norm or the homosexual exception, being something else makes others question his gender. But ultimately he accepts his sexual indeterminacy as something positive: "when I did think about it I considered myself lucky that I could go to parties and go home with anyone from either sex . . . I could, you know, trade either way" (Kureishi, *BOS* 55). A metaphor for Karim`s varying sexuality is his passion for tea. He keeps various boxes of different teas in his bedroom, which he mixes in order "to concoct more original combos in [his] teapot" (Kureishi, *BOS* 62). Karim has a taste for varied flavours and having to choose one over the other would be devastating to him, in his words, it would be something "like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones" (Kureishi, *BOS* 55). Karim seems to personify Judith Butler`s statement that "if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured" (Butler

192). In other words, more than biologically rooted behavior, if gender and sexual roles and the other markers that make up identity are also culturally influenced (a cultural performance) then, there is no such thing as a stable identity. *The Buddha of Suburbia*`s main character seems to exemplify the fact that gender identity is a construct subjected to interests which are usually social (social pressure or rules to express one`s gender identity a certain way) but can also be individual. Such is the case of Karim who does not conform to a determined ethnic or gender identity and instead asserts his right to express his hybrid and malleable identity creatively. His construct as a heterosexual man comes from his reaction to the racial abuses he has suffered. Karim assumes that, often, having a relationship with a white woman is an act of defiance that stems from resentment and makes them want to show they can have what the white British society says they have no right to have: "and we pursued English roses as we pursued England; by possessing these prizes, this kindness and beauty, we stared defiantly into the eye of Hairy Back, into the eye of the Great Fucking Dane. We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it (Rushdie, *BOS* 227). Karim`s resentment about being pushed aside by his British girlfriend Eleanor, who is cheating with Pyke, a theatre director, makes him ponder about the subject of racism. He acknowledges that he does not love her and that his pain comes from the way in which she leaves him (he feels helplessly discarded), which echoes the racist behavior of discarding or pushing people aside.

The novel depicts masculinity either at the mercy of women, particularly white women, or as a tool of racial revenge. Instead of depicting British white men engaging in relationships with women from former colonies, the interracial sexual relationships in the novel focus on marginal Indian men engaging in relationships with white British women. Haroon starts an affair with Eva and one cannot refrain from thinking that, more than love, his upward social mobility into white British upper class is behind it. Karim dates Eleanor, his acting colleague, and the reader feels that a bit of class envy is implied because of the manner in which he describes her upper class comforts and connections. Karim is not as driven by love as he is by his desire of upward social mobility. And he also starts a relationship with Hairy Back`s daughter, Helen, out of revenge for her father`s racist attack. But, both Karim and Haroon are also at the mercy of British white women: Karim feels helpless when he is dumped by these women and Haroon sees Eva take more and more control of his life (including his livelihood

because she is the one who manages him and establishes the contacts for his guru performances). Another example of masculinity being subjected by women is the marriage of Changez and Jamila. In this case Changez`s masculinity is subjected to a gender role exchange with Jamila who Karim describes with masculine attributes as if to enhance this fact: she is "forceful and enthusiastic . . . always seemed to be leaning forward, arguing, persuading. She had a dark moustache, too, which for a long time was more impressive than my own" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53). She often assumes roles that society associates with men such as initiating casual sex with Karim. She does not accept being the traditional role of a Muslim wife and, instead, chooses to have an open marriage (which she forces on Changez) and lead a life full of sexual partners. Changez cheats on Jamila by having an affair with Shinko, a Japanese prostitute, without telling Jamila about it. But when he catches Karim and Jamila together naked in her bed he accuses her of "adultery, incest, betrayal, whoredom, deceit, lesbianism, husband-hatred, frigidity, lying and callousness as well as the usual things" (Kureishi, *BOS* 134). He tries to impose the traditional view of gender roles on her and assert his masculinity by telling her that it is based on the Koran but this episode ends with Changez getting punched on the face. After she has a child with her lover and tells Changez that she is now a lesbian, he decides to stay in the relationship and assumes all the house chores like cleaning, cooking or washing and cares for Jamila`s baby as his own going totally against the gender role assigned to men in his culture. Jamila even befriends his Japanese mistress Shinko and the two get together to talk about everything including sex, which leaves him feeling helpless. He feels it is humiliating for the two to talk about sex in front of him so openly but he is totally submissive to whatever these women decide. For the love of Jamila and because he knows he cannot change her, Changez, whose name seems to imply a phonetic play with ´change`, chooses to change his role and to do the chores attributed to women. This is an example of the position defended by theorist Judith Butler that gender roles are a construct. Because gender roles do not have a real basis and are imposed by political, cultural or religious discourses Changez is perfectly capable of redefining his role even though he is not comfortable with it yet.

Although the present study agrees with O`Shea-Meddour`s work "The Politics of Imagining the Other in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*" which reveals the feminine characters of the novel seem to be a bit overlooked (39), when it comes to the

subject of gender they are just as hybrid, disruptive and important for the critical debate. Following Langford`s notion in "Margins of the City: Towards a Dialectic of Suburban Desire" that sexualities and gender are more passible to be dictated and enforced by social rules the closer one is to the centre of British cultural hegemony, or London (64-72), although less mentioned, the feminine characters show otherwise. They seem stronger in their approach to undermining culturally determined gender roles. While Charlie moves to The United States where he feels free to play with his liminal sexuality, characters like Jeeta, Jamila or Eva construct their own identities as women regardless of being in the marginal suburbs or in the very centre of London. Jeeta recreates her identity as a business woman and takes over her husband`s business in the suburb of Bromley despite his complaints, Jamila plays openly with the roles people attribute to her gender regardless of being in the suburbs spanking someone for a racist comment or in London visiting some lover, and Eva also defies gender roles by recreating herself as her Indian lover`s controlling agent right in the heart of London.

Apart from Karim, another character who seems to confirm a perspective of identity as undermining of culturally determined gender roles is Jamila. The daughter of Karim`s conservative uncle Anwar, Jamila refuses to be involved in the marriage her father has arranged for her. And refuses to give in to Anwar`s emotional blackmail in the form of a hunger strike in order to get his own way: "´I won't eat. I will die. If Gandhi could shove out the English from India by not eating, I can get my family to obey me exactly the same . . . [Jamila] to marry the boy I have selected with my brother`" (Kureishi, *BOS* 60). For Anwar, "there are just certain ways in which this woman who is his daughter has to behave" (Kureishi, *BOS* 81). Karim arguments in favour of Jamila by telling his uncle that Indians do not marry like that any longer, that they date before marrying, if they marry at all, but uncle Anwar is set on the Indian culture`s ways: "´That's not our way, boy. Our way is firm. She must do what I say or I will die. She will kill me`" (Kureishi, *BOS* 60). Anwar is not like Jamila`s generation which embrace hybridity and fluid identities that give them a need to be free to make their own choices. Anwar represents rigidity and fixity and he is certain that his way is the only valid way. A parallel can be established between these characteristics of an Asian character and the oppression of the colonizer: both see their way as the only correct way and try to force others to comply with their decisions. Through Anwar`s behaviour of "literally staking his life on the principle of absolute patriarchal authority"

(Kureishi, *BOS* 64) Kureishi shows us a culture that, although oppressed, it is also capable of oppressing. Imposing something on someone that, he believes, is socially beneath him (which in this case is Jamila because she is a woman and therefore property of the ´head of the family`) reflects the totalitarian behavior of the British colonizer in India. This also reflects the critical perspective of theorists like Loomba whose study *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* concludes that colonialism influences every aspect of the lives of the colonized and even if it has officially ended it continues to condition behaviors. It particularly influences the behavior of those who have some level of power which is then suppressed by the colonialist power:

> Colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonized lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the women as emblems of their culture and nationality. The outside world could be Westernized but all was not lost if the domestic space retained its cultural purity. (Loomba 168)

But Jamila is sexually aware and psychologically strong, set in her ways and is, in Karim`s words, "the strongest-willed person I`d met" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53). In fact, Jamila has a rebellious ability to recognize when someone is trying to change or mold her and resents it strongly. Even if that comes from a loved tutor, Miss Cutmore, who, like Jamila, likes "writers, coffee and subversive ideas" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53) and who tells Jamila she is brilliant. Jamila hates that her tutor forgets that she is Indian (as if she acknowledges only white people and then there is ´the rest`) and does not seem to accept the value of her ethnic perspective and "Jamila thought Miss Cutmore really wanted to eradicate everything that was foreign in her . . . [she often says] Miss Cutmore had colonized her" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53). Miss Cutmore, who as once been a missionary in Africa, seems to represent the colonialist mindset because, although she likes Jamila, she tries to change her into what she considers to be better as if, as a missionary, Jamila is her mission. Typical oppressive behavior of the colonialist that is incapable of recognizing anything good in the other and so, when they decide to help the other that means changing the other to their likeness, to adopt the British ways. So, for Miss Cutmore, helping Jamila develop her intellect means to instill in her western values and western thought and erase every shred of Indian ethnicity. The fact that Miss Cutmore is her teacher and they share so many things in common could make it easier

for Jamila to absorb that sense of negativity regarding her identity as an Indian woman but, being so aware and strong, "no one could turn her into a colony" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53). Jamila is politically, socially and ethnically aware and most of all, has a very clear notion of what being a woman means to her. She is politically inspired by the black power movements in America and the writing of Angela Davis and Malcolm X, and already "at the age of thirteen Jamila was reading non-stop, Baudelaire and Colette and Radiguet and all that rude lot, and borrowing records of Ravel, as well as singers popular in France, like Billie Holliday" (Kureishi, *BOS* 52). She seems to have created an hybrid, somewhat liminal, identity that sometimes exposes characteristics attributed to women by Indian culture (like accepting an arranged marriage, though only because she finds Changez a good friend who is supportive of her independence, hence a good ally), and at other times reveals a western emancipated woman that receives a western education and is sexually unashamedly free. And she often acts in ways that are disapproved by both cultures but very much like herself: she occasionally exerts her "PhD in physical retribution" (Kureishi, *BOS* 53) whenever someone shouts a racial slur at her. She is depicted as having an undefined sexuality as she has relationships with men but, at some point, decides she will only have relationships with women. Yet, her husband Changez goes against his ethnicity`s cultural norm, and is accepting of whatever she is. Karim`s description of Jamila seems to reveal that, although very aware of her ethnicity, she constructs an hybrid identity that allows her to fare well in England:

> there was in her a great depth of will, of delight in the world, and much energy for love. Her feminism, the sense of self and fight it engendered, the schemes and plans she had, the relationships – which she desired to take this form and not that form - the things she had made herself know, and all the understanding it gave, seemed to illuminate her tonight as she went forward, an Indian woman, to live a useful life in white England. (Kureishi, *BOS* 216)

The women in the novel escape the dichotomies of British-Asian because they do not conform to either social rules or good-evil as they behave according to their own wishes. Jeeta goes against her husband`s wishes and takes over the store, Jamila fulfils her desires by having casual sex with several men and women and refuses to consummate her marriage and Eva mirrors colonialist behaviour by exploiting Haroon`s

ethnicity in order to set him up as an oriental philosophy guru while recreating her identity in the process. Much like Karim who is openly disruptive of gender norms so are these feminine characters. The hegemonic norm that defines gender roles is a product of the power structure that determines what is acceptable or not. The gender subversiveness of these characters relies on the idea that, once you act outside your gender norm, you prove that alternatives to what is decided by the power structure are possible. This is the freedom (or power) given by this perspective of a fluid identity that escapes ethnicity and gender binaries, which, considering the respective differences, is also part of Salman Rushdie`s work.

In *Midnight`s Children*, so diverse and plural is Saleem`s identity that he can enter or "possess" the body of anyone: this even happens across gender barriers making Saleem`s gender identity fade. While at Khajuraho he is "an adolescent village boy, deeply embarrassed by the erotic, Tantric carvings on the Chandela temples" (Rushdie, *MC* 240), and while at Jaisalmer he samples "the inner life of a woman making mirrorwork dresses" (Rushdie, *MC* 240). This ability to change identities (including gender identity) comes, not as a clash of opposing views, but rather flows as something natural. Gender fluidity is quite common in Midnight`s Children in which some characters are openly androgynous like the boatman Tai with a "woman's lips" (Rushdie, *MC* 13) or the midnight child from Kashmir, "a blue-eyed child of whose original sex I was never certain, since by immersing herself in water he (or she) could alter it as she (or he) pleased" (Rushdie, *MC* 274). Such fluid identity disrupts both British and Indian social discourses and allows other perspectives on gender and this gender fluidity together with Rushdie`s depiction of women can be seen as an example that gender dynamics often mimic/reveal other power relations in society. While men (with their implied virility and strength) are the usual allegory for the strong colonizer, women are usually metaphorically associated with the submissive colonized people

However, as if to stress the importance of the feminine gender, Saleem Sinai reveals that his identity is defined by women and, at the same time, he destroys the social belief that attributes weakness and submissiveness to women: "women have made me; and also unmade. From Reverend Mother to the Widow, and even beyond, I have been at the mercy of the so-called and (erroneously in my opinion!) gentler sex (Rushdie, *MC* 404). Saleem recognizes women are omnipresent in his life and have

contributed to making him who he is, so he takes his time enumerating them, summarizing some of the influence they have had on his life, in order to stress this fact:

> my mother Mumtaz Aziz [who] became Amina Sinai; And Alia, with the bitterness of ages, who clothed me in the baby-things impregnated with her old-maid fury; and Emerald, who laid a table on which I made pepperpots march; There was the Rani of Cooch Naheen, whose money, placed at the disposal of a humming man, gave birth to the optimism disease . . . and, in the Muslim quarter of old Delhi, a distant relative called Zohra whose flirtations gave birth, in my father, to that later weekness for Fernandas and Florys; . . . Winkie`s Vanita [who] could not resist the centre-parting of William Methwold, and Nussie-the-duck . . . Mary Pereira, in the name of love, changed the baby-tags of history and became a second mother to me . . . Women and women and women: Toxy Catrack, nudging open the door which would later let in the children of midnight; the terrors of her nurse bi-Appah; the competitive love of Amina and Mary . . . And Evelyn Lilith Burns, cause of a bycicle-accident, who pushed me down a two-storey hillock into the Midst of history. And the Monkey. I mustn`t forget the Monkey. But also, also there was Masha Miovic, goading me into finger-loss, and my aunty Pia, filling my heart with revenge-lust, and Lila Sabarmati, whose indescretions made possible my terrible, manipulating, newspaper-cut-out revenge; (Rushdie, *MC* 566)

He reveals how a young Saleem already comes to the conclusion that women have shaped his identity throughout his life after two interrelated incidents. The first happens when a shy and insecure Saleem, in love with the American newcomer Evelyn Lilith Burns, offers her a flower necklace hoping that he will gain her affection: “I shyly gave her a necklace of flowers (queen-of-the-night for my lily-of the-eve), bought with my own pocket-money” (Rushdie, *MC* 251). But the shy and romantic one here is Saleem, not Evie a fearless bike riding, gun toting girl. She is not impressed with the flowers, “´I don`t wear flowers,` Evelyn said” (Rushdie, MC 251) and shoots the flower necklace with her air gun, tossing “the unwanted chain into the air, spearing it before it fell with a

pellet from her unerring Daisy air-pistol. Destroying flowers with a Daisy, she served notice that she was not to be manacled, not even by a necklace: she was our capricious, whirligig Lill-of-the-Hill" (Rushdie, *MC* 251). The second occurs when Saleem`s sister, the Monkey, reacts to Sonny Ibrahim`s love declaration. She waits for Mary Pereira (hers and Saleem`s Portuguese nanny) to leave them (the Monkey, Saleem and Sonny) alone at the bus stop and, with the help of two other boys, beats Sonny up and leaves him naked: "they were ripping every scrap of clothing off his body . . . Sonny yelling for help . . . tearful now, while the Monkey, ´That`ll teach you to talk shit – and that`ll teach you`, his shoes off; no shirt anymore; his vest dragged off . . . ´And that`ll teach you to write your sissy love letters`, no socks now, and plenty of tears" (Rushdie, *MC* 255).

So Saleem tries to influence the women around him by devising a brilliant strategy to let Evie know of his love for her: he knows of his friend`s Sonny`s love interest for his sister and convinces Sonny to approach Evie and talk about his virtues and how much he loves her, while he promises to do the same for Sonny by approaching his sister and trying to convince her to give Sonny a chance. However, after putting the carefully executed plan into action the outcome is less than great for the boys. His sister does not care and Saleem is not able to convince her: "´don`t make me sick, Allah,` my sister said when I tried . . . to argue Sonny`s case" (Rushdie, *MC* 257). And when Sonny defends Saleem`s case before Evie, Saleem hears the voice of Evie Burns "splitting the air with scorn: ´Who? Him? Whynt`cha tell him to jus` go blow his nose? That sniffer? He can`t even ride a bike!` Which was true" (Rushdie, *MC* 257). He feels somewhat inferior to Evie, a "witch on wheels . . . a power" (Rushdie, *MC* 252) who leaves the boys mesmerized with her prowess on a bicycle. Evelyn Lilith Burns, who Saleem calls his lily-of the-eve or Lill-of-the-Hill, seems to be Rushdie`s appreciation of the complexity of women and their capacity for good or evil, for appeasing or rebelling. A force to be reckoned with either way. Saleem often refers to the variants of her name which are based in Eve (Evie) or Lilith as the little girl Saleem admires and loves is both Eve and Lilith. The lily (Lill) of the valley (or the hill) is a sweetly scented and also highly poisonous flower that some mythologies say are Eve's tears after she was driven with Adam from the Garden of Eden. And Lilith, according to Semitic tradition and the mythology of many Asian and middle eastern countries, is

Adam`s first wife who is expelled from the garden of Eden because she does not submit to God`s orders (she dares to go outside the garden because she wants to know what lies beyond) and she refuses to be subservient to her husband. She wants to be treated as an equal: "Adam said: ´You lie beneath me.` And Lilith said: ´You lie beneath me! We are both equal for both of us are from the earth.`" (Hammer 6). Rushdie further reinforces the connection with the myth of Lilith by giving Evie the last name of Burns because Lilith is associated with fire, being described as a beautiful woman from her head to her navel and a burning fire from the navel down. In Evelyn Lilith Burns her part of Lilith comes out in an independent, willful and determined character that Saleem admires. He feels somewhat inferior before women`s prowess and comes to the conclusion that women have a mind of their own and are impossible to influence. So he does not see women as victims, instead, he seems to resign to the fact that, somehow, women always have their way regardless of all men`s ´brilliant` strategies: "you can lay your strategies as carefully as you like, but women will undo them at a stroke" (Rushdie, *MC* 257).

Rushdie portrays women as complex and in a subtly complex manner as well. Considering Neluka Silva`s argument in *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writings from South Asia* that cultural, religious and political discourses limit women to their definition of normative roles (53), one can expect to find women in the novel to be either conforming to the strict feminine gender role set by Indian social norm or to be rebelling against it. Yet Rushdie evades these expectations and presents a more complex picture of the feminine gender. A good example of his portrayal of women is Saleem`s description of his partner Padma. She is not submitted to the role Indian society expects from a woman because she is daring for living with Saleem maritally without being married but she is, however, submissive to a man that does not treat her with the respect he should. A man that knows he is misleading her by giving her false hopes of marriage:

> our Padma Bibi, long suffering tolerant consoling, is beginning to behave exactly like a traditional Indian wife. (And I, with my distances and self-absorption, like a husband?) Of late . . . I have smelled, on Padma`s breath, the dream of an alternative (but impossible) future . . . she has begun to exude the bittersweet fragrance of hop-for-marriage. My dung-lotus, who remained impervious for so long to the sneer-lipped barbs

> hurled by our workforce of downy-forearmed women; who placed her cohabitation with me outside and above all codes of social propriety, has seemingly succumbed to a desire for legitimacy . . . The perfume of her sad hopefulness permeates her most innocently solicitous remarks. (Rushdie, *MC* 384)

Saleem, however, also seems to appreciate Padma despite the fact that, from the height of his writing, he lets the reader know she is below him intellectually by describing her as illiterate in a deprecating tone and telling how he tries to educate her. Despite the apparent patriarchal machismo Saleem recognizes her importance to him: "how to dispense with Padma? How give up her ignorance and superstition, necessary counterweights to my miracle-laden omniscience? How to do without her paradoxical earthiness of spirit, which keeps – kept? – my feet on the ground?" (Rushdie, *MC* 206). He also reveals another side to his situation with Padma: he explains that she provides the critical response and aesthetic counsels to his story, and he admits he does not satisfy Padma as he should and that she is, although lovingly submissive, also quite sexually demanding and her rages and badgering seem to be always on the back of Saleem`s mind as he writes the story. So, submissive and effacing Padma is the demanding force behind their intimacy and his story.

Rushdie`s depiction of women can be considered subversive because he shatters traditionally employed binary opposition of the woman as passive, caring and all-enduring versus the active, selfish and aggressive man. Rushdie plays with the traditional metaphors which scholars have built upon (the binary of the feminine as a representation of the oppressed, subdued colony and the masculine, to which one links power, strength and initiative, as a metaphor for the ruling colonizer) to reveal how these gender roles are of use to both the British colonial power and to the nationalistic discourses of the once colonized nations. In Indian post-colonial literature women are often depicted as the keepers of values and customs that help establish a sense of nation, who embody a national ideology that helps establish a stance against the British colonizer, as Cerasela Baston-Tudor concludes:

> as the exponent of the Hindu tradition, women are the keepers of the household honour and the procreators, and this is in fact just another manner of controlling their lives. In these conditions, the conceptualization of womanhood is to be related to the epic-religious tradition which envisages female persons within the social structure of the family according to the image of the ideal wife after the models of Sita and Savitri, on the one hand, and to national ideology that connects the image of the ideal mother with that of Mother India which is a pure locus unprofaned by colonisation, on the other hand. This innocence is then bestowed upon women who are placed in connection to the family and who are supposed to preserve the purity of their home and all that is done in order to disqualify British colonialism. (21)

In Rushdie`s novel we see women mirror the discrimination and oppressive power of the colonizers. Contrary to the common representation of women as victims of the colonizer/colonized binary to some extent, or as victims of the ´double colonization` that "refers to the fact that women are twice colonized - by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones too" (McLeod 175), Rushdie depicts several feminine characters as just as ruthless, oppressive and filled with prejudices as the colonizer. Naseem, Saleem`s grandmother, who is also known as Reverend Mother, seems to be an example of the perpetuating of social and religious prejudices which support patriarchy or lead to ethnic conflict. Naseem helps feed the gossip about her husband`s friend The Rani (who organizes get-togethers in which a group of friends discusses political and cultural issues) of being a seductress and a witch:

> The Rani did not live like other Indian princes. Instead of teetar-hunts, she endowed scholarships. Instead of hotel scandals, she had politics. And so the rumours began. 'These scholars of hers, man, everyone knows they have to perform extra-curricular duties. They go to her bedroom in the dark, and she never lets them see her blotchy face, but bewitches them into bed with her voice of a singing witch!` Aadam Aziz had never believed in witches. He enjoyed her brilliant circle of friends

> who were as much at home in Persian as they were in German. (Rushdie, *MC* 56)

Aadam Aziz seems to be the voice of reason and continues to visit his friend even if Naseem does not like it. They also embody a completely different attitude towards religion. She wants the religious education of her children to be based on Quran and, according to her husband, Aziz (who seems to be the tolerant one), she does not mind subjecting her children to a religious education that teaches them to hate everyone that does not have the same religious beliefs: "hate Hindus and Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what other vegetarians. Will you have hateful children, woman?' " (Rushdie, *MC* 51). Like Naseem who potentiates ethnic hatred, many of these women perpetuate the racial discrimination started by the white colonizer: for them white or fair skin is associated with all things positive and darker skin with inferiority. Saleem`s mother, Mumtaz, is shocked to see a white beggar: "she finds herself looking into the face of — impossible! - a white man, who stretches out a raggedy hand . . . while she looks with embarrassment into a white face" (Rushdie, *MC* 106). Part of this surprise is due to the fact that Mumtaz has always experienced and lived by this kind of segregation all her live. Saleem`s mother, Mumtaz, is seen as defective/ugly because she has darker skin and her own mother, Reverend Mother, sees her as "the blackie whom she had never been able to love because of her skin of a South Indian fisherwoman" (Rushdie, *MC* 69). In Zohra`s words: "´how awful to be black, cousinji, to wake every morning and see it starring at you, in the mirror to be shown proof of your inferiority! . . . even blackies know white is nicer, don`tyouthinkso?`" (Rushdie, *MC* 89-90). These Indian women are retainers of all the racial prejudices British cultural hegemony has left them with and are perpetuating the prejudices that the former colonizer has instated against their own people, the Indians. This color coded world is created by the British who, within Indian culture, construct a world apart to separate themselves from the inferior, darker skin indigenous people. Much like the Breach Candy Swimming Club "where pink people could swim in a pool the shape of British India without fear of rubbing up against a black skin" (Rushdie, *MC* 124-125). Instead of being open to discover a new culture that is perfectly adapted to the new geography they are now inhabiting, the British segregate themselves within exclusive areas in which they re-enact an existence like if they were in Britain. The white skin of

the colonizer is considered beautiful and a pre-requisite to do well socially like getting a good husband: "´Poor girl,` Padma concludes, kashmir are normally fair like mountain snow but she turned out black. Well, well, her skin would have stopped her making a good match, probably`" (Rushdie, *MC* 71).

Rushdie disrupts idealized gender norms with his portrayal of women as maintainers of the oppressive norms of British cultural hegemony or as devils just as violent as men. Another female character that is very representative of the dynamics of the colonizer is The Widow. A clear symbol for Indira Gandhi, India`s Prime Minister and the female leader in power, The Widow goes against the cultural stereotype that women are caring, nurturing or empathetic. Following student movements opposing her allegedly corrupt government, in 1975 Indira Gandhi declares a State of Emergency in India under the pretext of imposing law and order but the purpose of this is only to defend her own interests. So much so that, in the days following the declaration, authorities arrest and detain without trial much of the political opposition and other dissenters, and impose press censorship. Soon enough Gandhi is also institutionalizing a family planning scheme that enforces the sterilization of millions of citizens. The Widow`s construct of gender mirrors Indira Gandhi`s. Just like Gandhi, so does The Widow play a role based on a culturally constructed femininity evoking the constructed typical image of the woman as a caring caretaker and projecting an aura of vulnerability, service, motherhood and domesticity only to better impose her politics and secure her position. She portrays herself as servile and submissive but she is assertive, oppressive and ruthless. Rushdie`s depiction of The Widow is in line with Judith Butler`s concept (*Undoing Gender*) that gender is a performance that follows cultural guidelines (41-53). That is to say that the way in which men and women are expected to act as their respective gender is established by the power structures of a determined culture. In this case of post-colonial India the gender norm implies that women should be seen as passive and caring and yet, Rushdie shows that that is only a façade for their strong will and determination and, in some cases, cruelty. This seems to exemplify that the rigid cultural definition of gender is an invention usually used to control. Like Gandhi, her historical counterpart, The Widow is shown to be evil and just as capable of the same evil acts the most violent men are. In the novel the Widow conspires to stop the children of midnight from being born and in one of her first

appearances she is depicted as an evil monster snatching children and murdering them: "the Widow`s arm is hunting see the children run and scream the Widow`s hand curls round them . . . one by one the children mmff are stifled quiet . . . one by one . . . the sky is black there are no stars the Widow laughs . . . and children torn in two in Widow hands which rolling rolling halves of children" (Rushdie, *MC* 288). The violence in the description of the Widow seems to mirror the violence of the historical events.

The sterilization programme, represented in the novel by The Widow`s intent to stop the birth of the children of midnight by the "smashing, the pulverising, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight" (Rushdie, *MC* 4), and its denial of the basic right of reproduction echoes the dynamics of imperialism. These women act nothing like the gender role either the British or Indian attribute to women, which seems to stress that gender behavior is a socially assigned role people play. Rushdie's representation of women disrupts both British and Indian official narratives of gender. These feminine characters are used to subvert the colonizer`s cultural hegemony not only by stepping out of gender roles, but, like The Widow, also by emulating colonialist behavior. Non-conforming to gender roles is subversive because they show that it is possible to live an alternative to the ways that are institutionalized. The description of Indian characters that mimic the oppressive behavior of the colonizer subverts the expectations of those who might expect a novel that is limited to criticizing the British colonizer. Characters like The Widow make it easier to question such oppressive conduct and its official justification and can be seen as a form of resistance. Rushdie criticizes the apparent contesting of colonial discourses that comes with the surge of nationalism in post-colonial India because, just like the colonial power, so does the Indian political class use the gender role attributed to women to enforce ideas that are not in the best interest of the population and to establish their power.

The treatment of gender identity in both novels can be considered subversive because their characters have a fluid identity that escapes ethnicity and gender binaries. They act outside their gender norm proving that alternatives to what is decided by the power structure are possible. Characters like Jeeta, Jamila, Charlie and Karim undermine the practices, and identity that both the Indian and the British cultures attribute to the female-male gender binary because of the hybrid and liminal way in which they depict gender. The sexual and gender hybridity of *The Buddha of Suburbia*`s

characters (their play with the creation of shifting sexual identities) goes against the established norm because the characters are not bound to one exclusive group. This means they are free to be critical of anything or anyone regardless of ethnical, cultural or gender identity because they are not bound to following the beliefs and behavior norms of a determined group. The novel reveals that gender and sexuality, like other identity markers, are culturally determined and subjected to certain interests. Karim recreates his identity outside cultural influences and traditional discourses of gender and sexuality. He escapes this by not choosing within the binary of English/Asian or heterosexual/homosexual and creates another possibility for himself: bisexuality. Hence, it is easy to understand why, according to Graham Huggan (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*) the novel can also be chosen to exemplify Judith Butler's perspective on gender as being a performative act (95). Likewise, Rushdie also represents gender identity as something fluid and unstable and establishes a connection between personal and national identity and history only to reveal that, just like national identity, so is gender identity fluid and hybrid. Saleem`s identity is so fluid that he enters different gendered bodies and can be a woman one day and a man the next. Saleem`s gender fluidity, his perspective of how he is at the mercy of and shaped by women, his admiration for the independent, willful and determined character of Lilith Burns, and Rushdie`s play with the traditional metaphor of the feminine as a representation of the oppressed, subdued colony through the demonizing of women (The Widow) can be interpreted as subversive. The novel depicts women in a way outside both British and Indian official narratives of gender. Through characters like the Widow Rushdie demonstrate how gender roles are nothing but a social or cultural construct and questions the oppressive conduct of colonialist behavior and the official justifications for the conduct of the Indian ruling class that emulates it.

SUBVERSIVE NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

This section compares the use of language in both novels in order to show how two apparently very different writing styles and narrative choices have a common ground: they subvert British cultural hegemony by questioning established truths. This perspective is grounded on Mikhail Bachtin`s concepts of hybridization and carnivalesque. According to Mikhail Bakhtin linguistic hybridity is subversive because it allows other voices to be heard (Young, 136). Much like creole languages which are creations resulting from colonization, so does Rushdie create a new English by mixing it with Indian dialects enabling Indian voices to be heard. Similarly, Kureishi uses Bachtin's concept of the carnivalesque which celebrates "the temporary liberation from the dominating truth and the existing social hierarchy, [and] the temporary abolition of hierarchical conditions, all privileges, norms and taboos" (Bachtin 58) in order to speak for/about the marginalised Indian immigrant in Britain. Cultural hybrids themselves, in their writing the authors bring forth for discussion a very important perspective because they have been confronted with the ephemeral essence of all truths. They have dealt, at least, with two opposing ´truths` as culturally displaced people and as hybrids they are

> not only double-voiced and double-accented […] also double-languaged; […] It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms […] such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words. (Bhabha 58)

The resulting narratives are fertile ground for literature theorists, who have studied what they perceive as extremely important narrative strategies in both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Midnight`s Children*, and how these strategies ultimately articulate the subjects of identity, history and nation. Critical reviews of *The Buddha of Suburbia*`s narrative strategies focus on Hanif Kureishi`s playful use of intertextuality, irony or sarcasm. According to Jorg Helbig in "´Get back to where you once belongued`-Hanif

Kureishi`s use of the Beatles-myth in The Buddha of Suburbia", the blurring of high versus low culture which mirrors the confront between British mainstream culture and a marginal immigrant culture is also achieved through intertextuality (77-81). For Helbig, Kureishi`s intertextual references to the Beatles and the theme of pop music are a deliberate narrative artifice used to dissolve the traditional borderline between popular and high culture (77-81). With no particular character or social group designed to carry the main force of irony, Kureishi`s depiction of the banality and boredom of a quotidian life in which, according to Karim most people are in bed by 10.30 pm and most kids his age live in their bedrooms listening to music, is, according to Naheem Yousaf (*Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia: A reader's guide*), his main vehicle for satirizing British society (36-41). This satire is often achieved through some events of situational comedy, but mostly through the carnivalesque resulting of Karim`s language and comments. Frederick M. Holmes` study *"*Comedy, the Carnivalesque, and the Depiction of English Society in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim"* stresses the subversiveness of Karim's foul-mouthed language (123-124). Both Holmes and Cynthia Carey have applied Bachtin's concept of the carnivalesque to their study of the comic treatment of neo-colonial stereotypes and racist behaviour in the novel. In her essay "*The Buddha of Suburbia* as a Post-Colonial Novel", Carey sees the novel as "resistance literature" (123) as she sees in Karim`s vulgar language and his play with standard English a "subversion of high-culture authority and the subversion of the colonial legacy in British society" (Carey 124). For Allison and Curry ("All Anger and Understanding: Kureishi, Culture, and Contemporary Constructions of Rage") Karim utilizes elements of sarcasm and parody as scorn to compensate for his powerlessness as a marginalized individual who cannot change "his own inability to recast himself out of non-stereotypical roles" (Allison and Curry 161).

In this dissertation the sarcasm, irony or even a certain marginal rudeness in Karim`s narration, are approached as Kureishi`s comical exploitation of ethnic stereotypes and the dissection of characters that could otherwise promote the burden of representation. As part of a minority himself, Kureishi defies expectations by targeting with his humour both Asian and British characters alike. This is shown in this study to be subversive because someone with such freedom is able to criticize any kind of discourse be it marginal or authoritarian. Kureishi's narrative refuses to take sides (to neither the empowerment of the marginalized nor the powerful mainstream) which

makes it impossible for readers to decipher both the author and his protagonist's political position. Kureishi subverts the traditional relationships between the colonizer and the colonized and the oppositions of centre and periphery and, in doing so, helps the marginalized postcolonial 'other' to find a voice. The novel`s language alone (its narrative strategies) shatters the expectations of it being enclosed in the category of ethnic writing and numerous critics see in its postcolonial hybridism a universalist characteristic that makes it difficult to define. Many theorists focus on this universalist character of the novel. Mark Stein ("Posed Ethnicity and the Postethnic: Hanif Kureishi's Novels") sees the novel as an example of postcolonial literature as it is written in a manner that reveals the awareness of the expectations a novel about a marginalized ethnicity written by someone from a cultural minority faces (119- 140). Kureishi`s novel is, like the protagonist Karim Amir, a hybrid of some sort that escapes any defined classification. Because of this difficulty in placing the novel within a determined category it is studied in theoretical literature as a postcolonial novel, a postmodern novel, a bildungsroman, a comedy, a carnivalesque novel, grotesque realism novel or a picaresque novel. The very fact that Kureishi`s writing clearly escapes definitions supports the importance of hybridity, liminality or indeterminacy as aspects that subvert expectations. Any reader that approaches the novel with the preconceived idea that it can only be exclusively defined as a postcolonial novel, will come to realize that it does also fit the classification of a bildungsroman, a postmodern novel, a comedy or even a grotesque realism novel.

These narrative mechanisms in *The Buddha of Suburbia* rely on a realistic and linear narrative because, as Kureishi reveals in an interview about his work, magical realism has never had any appeal to him because he wants to convey the reality of life in the suburbs and for those people who are at the margins of British society (ethnically or geographically in Bromley, in this case) there is no glimpse of magic anywhere. Hence, *The Buddha of Suburbia* follows a linear timeline as the intradiegetic narrator, Karim, narrates the contemporary story resorting to humor, satire, parody and irony in a very realistic and linear manner. Karim lets the reader know that he is narrating the story to Jamila, who wants to know about every dirty little secret, anything she considers interesting or she walks away and so it seems much of the narrative is written in a burlesque style for Jamila`s amusement. It seems that part of Kureishi`s narrative

strategy relies on the use of surface comedy to add complexity to the narrative as he constantly mixes the ironic and comical tone in the novel with serious observations. That is to say that through the carnivalesque, Kureishi approaches subjects such as forced marriages, tradition or racial violence. All of this is transmitted through Karim`s perspective. The reader only gets Karim`s reflections and, as a young Karim does not verbalize a specific point of view regarding the racial abuse he suffers, sometimes the reader is left to wonder if there is a critical stance against racial violence or just a mere description of facts. However, Kureishi`s criticism rests on the mocking tone of the narrative and the ludicrous portrayals of Asian characters. One narrative strategy associated with humour and used to characterize an Asian character is intertextuality, which establishes a correlation between Kureishi`s novel and the Beatles, the music the young transgressors listened to at the time. This study parallels Helbig`s opinion that Kureishi`s intertextual references to the Beatles are a deliberate narrative artifice employed to, through references to pop music, delete the popular versus high culture divide (77-81), and tries to show the relevance of marginal discourses in communicating the views of those at the margins of British society. In his *The Faber Book of Pop*, Kureishi explains that "writing about pop introduces us to the fringes of the respectable world, to marijuana, generational conflict, clubs, parties, and to a certain kind of guiltless, casual sex that had never been written about before" (Ranasinha 15). From describing emotional states or the music scene in London to convey Karim`s feelings about determinate places, to comparing a character to the Beatles, the intertextual association to pop music permeates the whole novel and allows Kureishi to approach marginal subjects. A part of popular culture, pop music opposes dominant discourses and communicates the thought, wishes and desires of the marginal.

Karim often establishes a parallel between his father Haroon with "his Nehru jacket, collarless and buttoned up to the throat like a Beatle jacket" (Kureishi, *BOS* 282) and the Beatles. He says Haroon copies the Indian-style clothes of The Beatles in order to create his Indian mystic guru character: "he was certainly exotic, probably the only man in southern England at that moment (apart, possibly, from George Harrison) wearing a red and gold waistcoat and Indian pajamas" (Kureishi, *BOS* 31). With the comic treatment of communal expectations, like this humorous depiction of an Asian character as a copy of a westerner`s take on exotic mysticism, Kureishi undermines any

expectations to represent the Asian community vis-à-vis the mainstream culture or to offer clear portrayals of minority experience. This freedom from the public expectation imposed upon writers to represent their communities (burden of representation) seems to reflect Kureishi's refusal to abide to anything that can potentially condition his voice. The narrative of *The Buddha of Suburbia* relies on the comical exploitation of ethnic stereotypes and the dissection of characters that could otherwise promote the burden of representation. A good example of humour serving the comical exploitation of stereotypes happens when, after being verbally attacked by Hairy Back, a white supporter of right wing politics whose daughter Karim is dating, Karim rejoices over his revenge. He is going out with Hairy Back`s daughter and four Asian friends in Hairy Back`s Rover and is ecstatic to let readers know that, if Hairy Back only knew there are four ´pakis` with their ´dark arses` on his leather seats he would be furious. These terms show Kureishi`s appropriation of racially degrading words and using them for a comic and ironic effect. Karim challenges British cultural hegemony, here in the form of white supremacist Hairy Back, with their own language. And, although Karim relishes in using humour against characters like Hairy Back, all characters are equally scorned. Neither ethnicity is idealized while the other is demonized instead. All characters share positive and negative traits. The very own Karim Amir, the novel`s narrator and main character, ranges from the sympathetic immigrant victim to a bit self-centred and cynical as he becomes increasingly cynical. Instead of feeling humiliated for being made to represent a poor travesty of another ethnic group, Karim becomes a demanding diva of the theatre throughout the play:

> Despite the yellow scarf strangling my balls, the brown make-up, and even the accent, I relished being the pivot of the production. . . . . I required a longer rest, and could I be driven home by someone, as I felt so tired? I had to have Assam tea (with a touch of lapsang souchong) available at all times during rehearsal. Could that actor slide a little to the right; no, a little further. I began to see that I could ask for the things I needed. I gained confidence. (Kureishi, *BOS* 150)

Karim`s character, with its pursuit of pleasure and fame at any cost, subverts the post-colonial criteria of oppositionality (the honest victimized immigrant versus the vile

British mainstream oppressor) and referentiality (Karim as a positive reference for the Asian community). Further, Kureishi`s own cynical account of what happens to Changez is another example of this. Changez is beaten on the street by a right wing group which carved symbols with a knife on his stomach. Karim seems quite cynical of the fact that the police were suspicious that Changez had hurt himself making the reader sympathize with Changez, the clear victim, against the police, the racist malefactor. However, Karim also reveals Changez as an abuser:

> if I knew my Changez, would be abusing any Pakistanis and Indians he saw in the street. 'Look at that low-class person,' he'd say in a loud voice, stopping and pointing out one of his fellow countrymen – perhaps a waiter hurrying to work or an old man ambling to the day centre, or especially a group of Sikhs going to visit their accountant. 'Yes, they have souls, but the reason there is this bad racialism is because they are so dirty, so rough-looking, so bad-mannered. And they are wearing such strange clothes for the Englishman, turbans and all. To be accepted they must take up the English ways and forget their filthy villages! They must decide to be either here or there. Look how much here I am! And why doesn't that bugger over there look the Englishman in the eye! No wonder the Englishman will hit him!' (Kureishi, *BOS* 210)

Although according to many critics the comic effects in post-colonial literature always mirror a fight for justice, or the plight for a balance of power, the ambiguous depictions created by Kureishi`s humour make unequivocal political readings of the novel impossible. Through this ambivalence and ironic humour Kureishi leaves it up to the readers to develop their own opinions. The narrative strategies he employs validate his appreciation for the freedom of individual perception as opposed to totalizing narratives that tell you who the hero and the villain are. It seems fair to state that Kureishi`s most recognizable narrative strategy is humour and comedy paired with Karim`s flair for the dramatic to reflect a more critical and complex side to the narrator. Although a young man prone to some exaggeration, Karim reveals an accurate perception and poignant criticism regarding everyone around him. This is a young man that is prone to some exaggerations typical of his youth and often uses the hyperbole: "It took me several

months to get ready: I changed my entire outfit three times" (Kureishi, *BOS* 6), and after his crush at the time, Charlie, criticizes the outfit he has so carefully chosen, he exclaims: "I contemplated myself and my wardrobe with loathing, and would willingly have urinated over every garment" (Kureishi, *BOS* 17). Nevertheless, Karim`s comedic tone in the creativity of coming up with nicknames for most characters reveals an extremely perceptive humour: Karim`s alcoholic aunt Jean and her husband Ted are called Gin and Tonic, Karim`s friend Changez is called Bubble-head, Bubble or Dildo Killer, his father Haroon is nicknamed Daddio, God and Buddha, and Shadwell, the theatre director is affectionately called Shitwell, Shagbaldy, Shadshit, Shotbold and Shit-volumes. A perfect example of comedy happens when Karim`s aunt decides to, at the best of her ability, display some morality and concern for family ties in order to convince him that Haroon`s life as a Buddha would harm the reputation and respectability of the family and have a negative impact on their central heating business Peter`s Heaters. Faced with his aunt`s cross-examination, he pretends to misunderstand it and finishes it with a fart that "needed to be free" (Kureishi, *BOS* 44). Karim`s fart seems to be "an assault . . . on his aunt's pretensions to refinement and exalted social status . . . [and on his aunt and uncle`s] imperialistic, racially exclusive definition of Britishness" (Holmes 650). Through a crude and vulgar humour that includes a lot of swearing, Karim brings forth the anarchical spirit of carnival and avoids victimization. It makes sense to note that, in a carnivalesque atmosphere "the crude and vulgar are enshrined. The fool reigns" (Sobchack 179) making it admissible to answer with a fart. This allows Karim to speak freely, to be a "naughty boy, [with] bad language" (Kureishi, *BOS* 171) which makes it possible to express his perspective even against those in power like when he exclaims "Bollocks" (Kureishi, *BOS* 171) after the police refuses to acknowledge that his aunt`s shop has been attacked by local fascists. These events of situational comedy and the carnivalesque resulting from Karim`s language and comments can clearly be interpreted as defiant. Karim`s vulgarity and witty satire as a narrator can also be seen as a position against British bourgeois appropriateness and conventionality represented by auntie Jean, who is really an hypocritical facilitator of social injustice. Karim's aunt Jean and uncle Ted's shallow middle-class integrity is ridiculed simply through the phonetic play of their nicknames of Gin and Tonic. She is calculating when establishing relationships, worships money and status and lives of appearances all the while being an alcoholic. Yet because Jean doesn`t like the fact that her sister married an Indian (which she often lets the family know), both Jean and Ted

refuse to call Haroon by his name and, instead, call him Harry. In addition to the comic effects in the novel revealing the asymmetrical relationships between the colonizer and the colonized they also subvert expectations and traditional oppositions.

Not only does the humorous play of the novel`s narrative subvert the expectations most readers have of a post-colonial writer, but also the comic treatment of white Britishness and national purity defy the concept of nation. Kureishi's humour also questions nationalistic discourses and the stability of concepts like nation, nationality and culture. The text seems to invite the readers to ridicule a character`s xenophobia through irony, comedy and satire such as Hairy Back, a follower of Enoch Powell, and his right-wing views on immigration which appeal to racial hatred: “We are with Enoch. If you put one your black hands near my daughter I will smash it with an “‘ammer!’” (Kureishi, *BOS* 40). Hairy Back comes across as a laughable idiot that does not get Karim`s comment and ignores what the reader already knows: that Karim has put more than his hands on his daughter. The comedy of the text seems to help depict this rejection and harassment of difference from Hairy Back as, more than a natural reaction, an institutionalized construct of power systems. In the case of Hairy Back, British cultural hegemony takes the form of Enoch Powell and conditions him to see Karim as an inferior, a subordinate that he wants to eliminate from his world by prohibiting him from contacting his daughter. Kureishi`s language comic reveals that the concept of nation as an imperial power is a creation that serves the oppression of others. A creation of Enochs and the like to, artificially, create a sense of a glorified nation. The artificiality of this superiority is the perspective the readers get in between laughter/smiles: “they still think they have an Empire when they don’t have two pennies to rub together” (Kureishi, *BOS* 27). Haroon`s humorous critique reveals that he feels he is at the margin of society and even the British concept of nation. Kureishi`s approach to national identity in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is manifested through the characters` sense of disillusionment and of not belonging that one can perceive in their language, namely through the use of irony and satire.

The humour in *The Buddha of Suburbia* reveals that the idealization of nation leads to crime and abuse of power. The British idealize themselves as a white nation

and are unable to see what the other truly is. Changez`s racist attack by a gang is the perfect metaphor for this situation:

> [they] called him a Paki, not realizing he was Indian. They planted their feet all over him and started to carve the initials of the National Front into his stomach with a razor blade. . . . The police, who were getting sick of Changez, had suggested that he'd laid down under the railway bridge and inflicted the wound on himself. (Kureishi, *BOS* 224–225)

For the British, Changez is not part of the British nation. He is an outsider whose ethnicity they cannot even identify but that doesn`t matter. What matters is that they see him as an intruder, someone that is not part of the white British nation and, therefore, does not deserve to be there. The power structures are also corrupted by this idealization of British nation. The authoritative power (the police) doesn`t really care about the facts or to serve justice, instead they are getting tired of him. This idealization of a superior white British nation is also fed to the colonized as the novel humorously reveals through Karim`s father`s misconceptions of the British nation as economically and intellectually superior:

> dad was amazed and heartened by the sight of the British in England, though. He'd never seen the English in poverty, as roadsweepers, dustmen, shopkeepers and barmen. He`d never seen an Englishman stuffing bread into his mouth with his fingers, and no one had told him that the English didn't wash regularly because the water was so cold—if they had water at all. And when Dad tried to discuss Byron in local pubs no one warned him that not every Englishman could read or that they didn't necessarily want tutoring by an Indian on the poetry of a pervert and a madman. (Kureishi, *BOS* 24–25)

The British nation he has been led to believe in does not exist. Kureishi`s humour exposes a critic, not only of the politicization of the concept of nation used to make the colonized other feel inferior before this great economic and cultural power, but also questions the "truths" (metanarratives) produced by a determined culture. The novel`s

narrative reveals that these "truths" are always subjected to many interests. Once again Kureishi escapes being defined through the binary colonizer/colonized and refuses to be simplistically classified as a critic of white Britain. Instead of focusing on showing just how questionable are the "truths" produced by British cultural hegemony, Kureishi gives us an example of how all cultures do this. Including the Indian culture: Jamila does not want the truth about her arranged marriage situation to be revealed because in her view all it does is "expose our culture as being ridiculous and our people as being old-fashioned, extreme and narrow-minded" (Kureishi, *BOS* 71). This is an example of what generates distrust in historical or cultural discourses: because what is made public is not necessarily the truth but what makes someone look better. Another example of distrust in cultural discourses and of the importance of a critical perspective regarding religious metanarratives happens when Karim visits Jeeta and Anwar after being away for a while. He finds Anwar has decided to go back home to India, while Jeeta, his wife, intends to stay in England and lead the business. Influenced by her daughter Jamila who seems to have "educated her in possibility, the child being an example to the parent" (Kureishi, *BOS* 172), Jeeta wants to solidify and expand the business. She wants to modernize the business and attract more British customers so she wants "to get a licence to sell liquor on the premises; she wanted to sell newspapers and increase the stock. She could see how it was all done, but Anwar was impossible, you couldn`t discuss anything with him" (Kureishi, *BOS* 172). Jeeta, who leads a typical Muslim woman`s subdued existence, is now measuring up the business (and perhaps herself) against other similar British businesses and realizes she has to offer the same array of products/services they do in order to compete with them. What Anwar sees in this is that she is approaching the ways of the white people and perhaps he feels he is losing his grip on her. Established by a patriarchal religion, his importance and leadership status comes from God, so his perspective is right and his decisions are to be obeyed and never questioned or defied by a woman: "like many Muslim men – beginning with the Prophet Mohammed himself, whose absolute statements, served up piping hot from God, inevitably gave rise to absolutism – Anwar thought he was right about everything. No doubt on any subject ever entered his head" (Kureishi, *BOS* 172). Through Karim, Kureishi solidifies his perspective regarding the blind belief in metanarratives (like religious metanarratives) engendering absolutism and not allowing things to evolve. Jeeta`s ideas are good and could save and make their business evolve but, because in

Anwar`s religion she is seen as a second class creature for being a woman, Anwar prefers to let the business fail.

The novel seems to reveal that the culture you live in (with all its codes and metanarratives) shapes individuals without them being fully aware of it and without this critical stance regarding national, historical or religious discourses, you let yourself be led to make choices that, in the end, go against yourself or what you would have chosen otherwise. Karim is, even without realizing it, shaped by the culture of the rough suburbs he lives in as he finds out when Eleanor comments on his accent: "´What accent?` I managed to say. ´The way you talk, it`s great.` ´But what way do I talk?` She looked at me impatiently, as if I were playing some ridiculous game, until she saw I was serious. ´You`ve got a street voice, Karim. You`re from South London – so that`s how you speak`" (Kureishi, *BOS* 178). He is immersed in a young culture that rebels by making a point of not listening and not learning anything because they want to rebel against the more privileged:

> by this ignorance we knew ourselves to be superior to the public-school kids, with their puky uniforms and leather briefcases, and Mummy and Daddy waiting outside in the car to pick them up. We were rougher; we disrupted all lessons; we were fighters; we never carried no effeminate briefcases since we never did no homework. We were proud of never learning anything except the names of footballers, the personnel of rock groups and the lyrics of ´I am the Walrus`. (Kureishi, *BOS* 177-178)

Like the culture they are trying to rebel against, they develop their own codes and exert peer pressure at anyone that does not conform: "at my school they taught you a bit of French, but anyone who attempted to pronounce a word correctly was laughed down" (Kureishi, *BOS* 177). Karim comes to realize that that is not the way and when later on he sees himself talking with people from a different background (namely Eleanor`s friends) people who write books "as naturally as we played football. What infuriated me- what made me loathe both them and myself- was their confidence and knowledge. The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing the way round a whole culture- it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital" (Kureishi,

BOS 117). Even though Karim has learned many things and cultivates his intellect any time and any way he can, he still regrets having conformed to the ideals of his peers and not having learned much when he was young. The novel seems to be a literary way to recall that the culture you live in (with all its codes and metanarratives) shapes individuals without them being fully aware of it and without this critical stance you let yourself be led to make choices that, in the end, go against yourself or what you would have chosen otherwise. This critical stance regarding national, historical or religious discourses that Kureishi reveals necessary, is linked to issues of representation. Kureishi`s perspective regarding the problem of representation, of how nations or cultures are portrayed is clear when Karim chooses to play a version of his uncle Anwar who is on hunger-strike, in order to force his daughter, Jamila, into an arranged marriage. Karim`s colleague Tracey, a black female actress in the group, objects strongly to the portrayal:

> 'Two things Karim,' she said to me. 'Anwar's hunger-strike worries me. What you want to say hurts me. It really pains me! And I'm not sure that we should show it!'
> 'Really?'
> 'Yes.' She spoke to me as if all I required was a little sense. 'I'm afraid it shows black people–'
> 'Indian people –'
> 'Black and Asian people –'
> 'One old Indian man –'
> 'As being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical. And as being fanatical.'
> 'Fanatical? … 'It's not a fanatical hunger-strike. It's calmly intended blackmail.' . . . 'Your picture is what white people already think of us . . . To the white man we`re already people without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys. I can`t believe that anything like this could happen . . . Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much, Karim?' (Kureishi, *BOS* 180)

Karim seems to embody Kureishi's decision not to take sides and instead choose the freedom to make both British and Asians equal victims of his humor. Karim wants to portray people as he sees them, regardless of their nation or culture: "´But this sounds like censorship.` ´We have to protect our culture at this time, Karim. Don`t you agree?` ´No. Truth has a higher value.` ´Pah. Truth. Who defines it? What truth?" (Kureishi, *BOS* 181). Karim`s reply seems to assert that a writer must be free to use the comic potential in language as an instrument that can be used to question social norms of decorum in order to expose abuses of power. This is why, after Changez tells Karim "you can`t be using my character in your acting business. No, no, no, definitely. And if you try and steal me I can`t see how we can be friends to talk to each other again! Promise?`" (Kureishi, *BOS* 185), Karim becomes enraged: "What was this – censorship? ´Promise? You cunt! I can`t fucking promise anything now! What are you talking about?`" (Kureishi, *BOS* 185). Despite his friendship with Changez, Karim does not accept any type of compromise that is going exert any level of censorship to his creative language. Through language, writers have the freedom to give a voice to the perspectives that no one else dares to: when Shadwell, the director of the play, insists with Karim to make an Indian accent which, Karim has already explained, is not only not realistic, but it is also an absurd parody for a play that is supposed to be realistic and that makes Karim feel uncomfortable, Shadwell looks at him in a rage as the cast watches:

> most of them sympathetically. One of them, Boyd, had some EST and assertion-training, and primal therapy, and liked to hurl chairs across the room as an expression of spontaneous feeling. I wondered if he might not have some spontaneous feeling in my defence. But he said nothing. I looked towards Terry. As an active Trotskyite he encouraged me to speak of the prejudice and abuse I`d faced being the son of an Indian. In the evenings we talked of inequality, imperialism, white supremacy, and whether sexual experimentation was merely bourgeois indulgence or a contribution to the dissolution of established society. But now, like the others, Terry said nothing but stood there in his tracksuit . . . I thought: You prefer generalizations like ´after the revolution the workers will

> wake up filled with unbelievable joy` to standing up to fascists like Shadwell. (Kureishi, *BOS* 147-148)

Karim wishes that, in face of Shadwell`s totalitarian control, someone would speak up as if all it takes to correct this injustice is language. This incident alone shows the reader that, when no one else dares to speak about the obvious prejudice and abuse, it is up to those like Karim, who use language creatively, to say something. Humour, satire and irony are strategies employed to support Kureishi`s defence of creative freedom and fight against social injustice. Likewise, Rushdie speaks against the powers that be by criticizing governments, exposing corruption, deconstructing religious beliefs and the concept of nation through humour, satire and magical realism.

Critical reviews of the narrative strategies in *Midnight`s Children* reinforce Rushdie`s magisterial use of language to, ultimately, establish his critique of a post-colonial India and its government. Rushdie`s peculiar use of language (the way in which he establishes a certain kind of hybridized English with its peculiar expressions and phrases using Indian words in English) leads critic Rustom Bharucha to, in his essay "Rushdie`s Whale", compare Rushdie`s work to a whale because of the huge proportions of both (159). In "Experiments With Truth", Robert Taubman studies the patterns of metaphor and analogy, and the use of fantasy in the novel and concludes that Rushdie`s originality is stylistic, as it relies on language (3-6). Wimal Dissanayake notes how Rushdie is influenced by the Arabian Nights and Indian traditional narrative techniques from Indian epics like the Ramayana, Panchatantra or Mahabharata, giving his narrative a structural innovativeness that differentiates his work from other Indo-English writers (233-236). Such perspective is also defended in the work of John Clement Ball, *In Satire and the Postcolonial Novel*, which concludes that Rushdie uses humor and satire as narrative strategies in order to oppose injustice and totalitarian discourses in the context of Indian culture and post-independence politics (211-218). Ball exposes how the satire and allegory in Midnight`s Children fit Menippean satire by going on to prove that it fits the characteristics of the genre that "optimistically celebrates or satirically negates the nation" (Ball 213). Ball focuses on Rushdie`s use of the fantastic and the abnormal psychological states (like split personality), dream states or unusual dreams, and strange passions which are all characteristic of Menippean satire, for testing a truth. Critics have recognized the

link between the narrative strategies used in the novel and the critique of historical metanarratives. In "´You Must Remember This: Salman Rushdie`s The Moor`s Last Sigh" Stephen Baker sees the fragmentary structure of *Midnight`s Children* as mirroring other types of fragmentation such as the fragmentation of Saleem`s identity, the fragmentation of his memory always going back and forward and never following a timeline, or the fragmentation of the Indian nation which is fragmented in several ethnicities (239- 242). The novel`s fragmented structure is linked with the narrator`s fragmented view of national and personal history. David Lipscomb, in his essay "Caught in a Strange Middle Ground: Contesting History in Salman Rushdie`s *Midnight`s Children*", sees in the mixing of elements of the fantastic with history a way in which to tell one`s version of historical events (163-180). The magical realism that appears in Saleem`s narrative and intertwines with history is used to make a serious political point and for critics like Ashutosh Banerjee ("Narrative Technique in *Midnight`s Children*") the novel is a clear political allegory that links national and personal events together (23-32). Rushdie summons Indian cultural traditions to convey a critical perspective of what is imposed by British hegemony or anything totalitarian in nature that Indian society inherits from the British. Rushdie The manner in which Rushdie interweaves fables and nationalism with Saleem`s private life and chaotic events much like a Bollywood film applying Indian traditions to his writing in such a masterful manner leads some critics like K. Raghavendra Rao to interpret the novel as an elaborate depiction of India: the superstitions of India`s past, the capitalism of the present and the dictatorial movements of both past and present., is the focus of (152-160).

Midnight's Children is a rather magisterially complex web of narrative resources set against a background of magical realism, a narrative technique that explores the boundary between fiction and truth by blurring the distinction between fantasy and reality. Magical realism seems the perfect choice to depict newly independent India because "the disparate materials pertaining to those times of political upheaval, popular upsurge, growing optimism, and chaotic developments that often bordered on the fantastic could not have been woven together by any other method but that of fantasy (Mitra 54). To weave such literary and narrative resources like satire, allegory, Hindu mythology, surrealism, science fiction, advertising jingles, and political slogans together, Rushdie uses an hybrid style that critics call ´Masala English` because of "the way it mixes

English with innumerable Hindi or Anglo-Indian expressions, with nonce words, malapropisms and multilingual portmanteau words, all of which distort and displace English in order to Indianize it" (Guilhamon 202). The author seems to justify the writing style of his narrative by comparing it with the interest and appeal Scheherazade`s tales have produced: "I return to sheets of paper . . . just as Scheherazade, depending for her very survival on leaving prince Shahryar eaten up by curiosity, used to do night after night" (Rushdie, *MC* 24-25). Apparently, Rushdie stresses the fact that, just like Scheherazade has kept herself alive by arousing the sultan`s interest with a new story every night, only the interest produced by his writing style will keep his perspective alive. The author is quite aware that through the use of language he is creating something as meaningful as the creation of life itself as he establishes a parallel between writing and the growth stages of an embryo: "what had been (at the beginning no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book –perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language" (Rushdie, *MC* 100). Rushdie`s novel seems to be the perfect representation of postcolonial writers

> expressing their own sense of identity by refashioning English in order to enable it to accommodate their experiences . . . remarking it as an attempt to challenge the colonial value-system it enshrined . . . [creating] new `englishes´ . . . through various strategies: inserting untranslatable words into their texts; by glossing seemingly obscure terms; by refusing to follow standard English syntax and using structures derived from otheer languages; of incorporating many different creolised versions of English into their texts. [. . .] The new `englishes´ could not be converted into standard English because they have surpassed its limits, broken its rules. As a consequence of this irredeemable difference, new values, identities and value-systems were expressed, and old colonial values whole-heartedly rejected. (*Mc*Leod 25-26)

The creative freedom of Rushdie`s ´masala` English fits into his choice of magical realism for the narrative of *Midnight`s Children*. Such a narrative technique equally accepts the ordinary and the extraordinary, blurring the distinction between fantasy and reality giving

the writer the freedom to present a determined point of view that does not have a place in historical ´reality`. Rushdie defends the importance of the use of these forms of popular culture in his language. In a reference to Hindi cinema and how popular culture creates its own version of reality, in the novel the character Lifafa Das has a sort of a proto-cinema contraption that consists of a box where one can peep in and see various colorful images: "inside the peepshow of Lifafa Das were pictures of Taj Mahal, and Meenakshi Temple, and the Holy Ganges . . . [and there are also pictures of] untouchables being touched; educated persons sleeping on railway lines" (Rushdie, *MC* 97). The images presented are unreal because in real Indian society there are no mixing of castes or religions and are typical of Indian cinema which often presents idyllic images that have no correspondence with reality. From this passage one realizes that, even though forms of popular culture like the cinema are often used to socialize and control, they can also be just like the Ganges which is a trans-boundary river, and come to include all sorts of voices that would not be heard otherwise. Before India`s independence Indians are portrayed in movies by the colonizer, often in stereotypical roles that result from their preconceived ideas. Popular culture has the power to be creatively subversive of totalitarian discourses and that is why The Widow wants to destroy the magicians and Picture Singh.

Typical of Indian epics and a good example of popular culture in the novel is magical realism. The reason for the prominent use of magical realism in the novel is explained in the chapter entitled "Many Headed Monsters", in which Amina travels to the seer to have her unborn son's future seen. Amina is frightened to visit what she considers to be a pagan establishment, and because of it her mind starts to project images of feral creatures in the ceiling shadows. Amina`s fear makes her see visions of wild animals on the roof: "Amina, blinking in the dark at the brightness of lanterns, makes out insane shapes on the roof: monkeys dancing; mongeese leaping; snakes swaying in baskets; and on the parapet, the silhouettes of large birds, whose bodies are as hooked and cruel as their beaks: vultures" (Rushdie, *MC* 109). Although the creatures Amina sees are not real and are only shapes made by the shadows cast by the men, they are represented as real creatures. This connection between projections of the mind and reality will be a focal point in the novel and a way to argument for a critical stance because ´reality` is often only the projection of someone`s mind. The meaning people attribute to things or events is not necessarily what it *is* but what they are conditioned (by their upbringing, education,

like and dislikes, social pressure, etc.) to see. As Rushdie writes in *Imaginary Homelands* meaning "is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved" (12). Reality seems to be a question of perspective hence the use of the fantastic to better encompass both personal perspectives on historical reality and complex emotional processes. Also, because the reader knows that magical realism expresses only a version of an ultimate reality and truth, it seems that magical realism leads to the questioning of the narrative as it is easier for the reader to question the reasoning behind such choice in telling a story. Faced with all the fantasy and creativity that magical realism adds to the text, the reader will most likely question if there is meaning behind it or to which purpose does the author use it. So it can be argued that the artifice of magical realism induces critical thought.

The elements of the fantastic are seen as an adoption of the storytelling technique from Indian epics but, unlike such epics which have a moral and didactic tone, the narrator of *Midnight`s Children* does not clearly state which perspective is real/right and what is real or unreal is uncertain not only to the reader but to the narrator. The characters themselves are part of the text`s intertwining of the real and the fantastic and are associated with mythical archetypes of the Hindu pantheon of gods: the character Shiva is associated with the Hindu god with the same name (Shiva) known as the destroyer; and Saleem and Aadam are associated with Ganesh, the elephant-headed god. Elements of the fantastic like telepathy, eating metal and stepping into and emerging from reflective surfaces; inflicting physical wounds with words; the power to fast grow any plant or smell any trail on earth; visit someone else`s dream or get inside someone else`s thoughts or even hum on such a low pitch that causes toothaches or high enough that it has "the ability of inducing erections in anyone in its vicinity" (Rushdie, *MC* 55), help bring forth a critical perspective of Indian history that otherwise would not be known. In line with David Lipscomb`s opinion that the novel`s mixing of elements of the fantastic with history is a way in which to tell one`s version of historical events, this study also adds that the telling of Saleem`s version of events subversively undermines the western version of history. Rushdie uses fantasy as a way to subvert reality in order to present the formerly (or presently) oppressed as extremely powerful and to put forward their perspectives into a society that usually does not have them into account.

To reveal Saleem`s version of history and establish a critique of Indian society the author chooses a narrative strategy characteristic of fantasy which consists of the blurring between the private or individual and the collective, reinforcing the entwining of the individual with history and nation. As if these characters are creating history or changing its course because their personal experiences have a direct effect in the history of their nation. The narrator and protagonist himself states that "from the moment of my conception, it seems, I have been public property" (Rushdie, *MC* 100) and tells how his slightest movement or thought impacts the millions of people that make up India: "to the tune of my little rhyme the first language riots got under way . . . I became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay" (Rushdie, *MC* 265-266), and "the war happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers" (Rushdie, *MC* 471). Saleem Sinai, the narrator, incorporates myth and fantasy into his recount of the historical events in India both before and, primarily, after the independence and partition of India, which took place at midnight on August the fifteenth, nineteen forty-seven. *Midnight`s Children* starts with Saleem explaining that he was born at midnight on August the fifteenth of nineteen forty-seven, at the exact moment India gained its independence from British rule. After that, every major event in Saleem's life is intertwined with some incident in the life of the nation which Saleem considers "not only my twin-in-birth but also joined to me (so to speak) at the hip, so that what happened to either of us happened to us both" (Rushdie, *MC* 538). Fictional events are synchronous to historical events: Shiva's explosion into Saleem`s life at the magician's ghetto coincides with the first nuclear explosions in the deserts of Rajasthan on the eighteenth of May of 1974, the marriage celebrations of Saleem and Parvati coincide with the Republic Day festivities, when Parvati (Laylah Sinai) steps into the labor room to give birth to Aadam Sinai is the exact moment Indira Gandhi is found guilty of malpractices in the previous elections, the birth of Saleem and Parvati's son, Aadam Sinai on June the twenty-fifth of nineteen seventy-five coincides with the very day Emergency is imposed in India,

> push, come on Parvati, push push push, and while Parvati pushed in the ghetto, J. P. Narayan and Morarji Desai were also goading Indira Gandhi, while triplets yelled push push push the leaders of the Janata Morcha urged the police and Army to disobey the illegal orders of the

> disqualified Prime Minister, so in a sense they were forcing Mrs Gandhi to push, and as the night darkened towards the midnight hour, because nothing ever happens at any other time, triplets began to screech it's coming coming coming, and elsewhere the Prime Minister was giving birth to a child of her own... [...] when the three contortionists had washed the baby and wrapped it in an old sari and brought it out for its father to see, at exactly the same moment, the word Emergency was being heard for the first time, and suspension-of-civil rights, and censorship-of-the-press, and armoured-units-on-special-alert, and arrest-of-subversive-elements. (Rushdie, *MC* 584)

Every circumstance that is part of Saleem`s life is closely tied to and echoes the history of India and it does not seem to be a coincidence that at a time in the history of a nation when there are arrests of opposing voices, censorship and suspension of civil rights, Saleem produces a newborn with the name of the first man. As if this is a passage of testimony from Saleem to his son and the reader expects this new Aadam to, like his father, be relevant to India by criticizing and exposing what is wrong in their nation. This connection between Saleem and India creates in the reader a set of expectations associated with the epic hero but such expectations do not last due to Saleem's comic failure to meet them. Although he denounces the abuse of power going on in his country he does not manage to change such state of affairs. But the irony of these expectations is conveyed through the description of a picture.

Saleem mentions two pictures: one hanging from his childhood bedroom wall right above his crib which features a fisherman pointing (creates expectation), and another that shows a baby Saleem sitting beside another painting of Walter Raleigh: "in a picture hanging on a bedroom wall, I sat beside Walter Raleigh and followed a fisherman`s pointing finger with my eyes; eyes straining at the horizon, beyond which lay – what? – my future, perhaps; my special doom" (Rushdie, *MC* 167). For critic Neil Kortenaar (*Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children"*), that picture is the materialization of the hope the heroic narrative of the colonial past will be projected into the future with India being as powerful as the past British empire (179-189). Walter Raleigh sought to colonize North America and has established the colony of Virginia and

the association with such a powerful colonial figure evokes expectations that Saleem will be just as relevant to India as Raleigh is to Britain. Because Saleem is India`s twin (both born on the same midnight), just like the nation, he is expected to be like Raleigh who expanded British territory, he is expected to help India reach the same power in some capacity. His mother and nanny even have a seamstress make him clothes just like the ones on the picture of Raleigh. But he grows up after the British are gone and now realizes that the seeds of British cultural hegemony are still strong in India and that its ruling class acts the same way as the colonialists. Saleem defrauds the expectations about him and is as flawed as an epic hero as he is as a narrator. He justifies his narration by explaining that the fantasy in the narrative discourse does not exclude the reality of the historical facts because he does not use fantasy to distort history for political purposes even though he admits that the story he is telling ends in fantasy: "don`t make the mistake of dismissing what I`ve unveiled as mere delirium; or even as the insanely exaggerated fantasies of a lonely, ugly child" (Rushdie, *MC* 277-278). The narrator intends to make it very clear that, despite the fantasy and fragmentation of the text, he is addressing important issues. Using a fantasist individual discourse to depict the unstable political reality of the time clearly shows that the narrative is not conditioned by the distinction between fantasy and reality.

Saleem`s rejection of anything that can condition the narrative is made quite clear when he reacts to Padma`s complaint that he keeps going astray and back and forward in what seems like "a crazy way" (Rushdie, *MC* 130) of telling his story: "here is Padma at my elbow, bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what happened next" (Rushdie, *MC* 130). Saleem`s narration is written in a style that makes it difficult to establish an historical sequence of events in the life of the protagonist because Saleem frequently shifts forward and backward in time. Right after the reader finds out about his birth date, the narrator flashes forward to his thirty-first birthday only to go back to the past and returning to the present and then what the future will bring. This pendulum movement of going back and forward in time is, as Saleem calls it, "the metronome music of Mountbatten`s countdown calendar" (Rushdie, *MC* 28) to independence. This fragmented chronology mirrors Saleem`s fragmented identity: "´Condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments . . . I have nevertheless done better than my grandfather; because while Aadam Aziz remained the sheet's victim, I have become its

master – and Padma is the one who is now under its spell`" (Rushdie, *MC* 165). While his grandfather falls for his grandmother as he discovers fragments of her body through the hole on the sheet and becomes dominated by thoughts of her, Saleem uses fragmentation in his narrative and has become such a master at it that he has Padma enthralled with the story so he is the one in control. Before his grandfather is emotionally at the mercy of a woman and caught on the curiosity to find out what is behind the sheet but now it is a woman (Padma) that is caught under the spell of the story and curious to know more. It can be argued that this is a way in which the narrator catches the readers` interest and makes the storyline more appealing. Such chronology also shows that the author is not so concerned in narrating the events in their de facto chronological order but conveying what the historical truth of the events is for the voiceless colonized Indian. Through the elements of the fantastic or surreal, Rushdie`s writing can be said to defy historical discourses that stem from racial dominance and cultural subordination. These elements of the fantastic in the text serve to expose the perspective of the colonized individual and establish it as valid, seizing the colonizer`s power to explain historical events on their behalf.

*Midnight`s Children* is not a mere display of Rushdie`s mastery of fantasy. He seems to use fantasy in order to depict historical truths as a mere question of perspective: "reality is a question of perspective, the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems- but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible" (Rushdie, *MC* 229). The perfect example of this happens through Saleem`s critique of the politicization of time itself. At the time of Partition (the historical division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan which occurred at midnight on August 15, 1947 making both nations independent of Great Britain), to distinguish itself from India, Pakistan set its clock back thirty minutes and these countries have been on time zones thirty minutes apart ever since. Saleem notes that something that seems so stable like time is changed to suit political interests and, although the thirty minute difference is not real, it is now so for the billions of citizens of both countries who lead their lives based on the established time:

> time has been an unsteady affair, in my experience, not a thing to be relied upon. It could even be partitioned: the clocks in Pakistan would run half an hour ahead of their Indian counterparts . . . Mr Kemal, who wanted

> nothing to do with Partition, was fond of saying, ´Here`s proof of the folly of the scheme! Those Leaguers plan to abscond with a whole thirty minutes! Time without Partitions,` Mr Kemal cried, ´That`s the ticket!` And S.P. Butt said, ´If they can change time just like that, what`s real any more? I ask you? What`s true?` . . . ´What`s real and what`s true aren`t necessarily the same.` (Rushdie, *MC* 102-103)

Another example of how certain interpretations of determined events are made official, is the Amritsar massacre (also known as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre). Although official reports refer to the Amritsar massacre as an act of civil unrest from the part of the Indians towards the law and order of the British and places the number of fatalities at 379 killed, the novel reveals a whole different story. Through the perspective of Aadam Aziz, Saleem Sinai`s grandfather, the reader realizes that in April 13 of 1919, in the Indian city of Amritsar, a peaceful and unarmed gathering of men, women, and children is present in the Jallianwala Bagh (Garden) to celebrate the Sikh religious New Year. To this follows an order of attack: Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, a British officer, orders British Army soldiers to attack the gathering of men, women, and children at Jallianwala Bagh based on the justification of civil unrest: "´Good shooting,` Dyer tells his men, ´We have done a jolly good thing`" (Rushdie, *MC* 42). The attack, which traps everyone inside the garden with no chances of escaping through the only exit that consists of a narrow alleyway, lasts around ten minutes. The gathering that is supposed to be a case of civil unrest turns out to be a peaceful one, and, also contrary to historical official reports, later numbers indicate that it results in a much larger number of deaths and serious injuries. Through the subjective nature of Saleem`s recollections the reader learns of these events in a whole new perspective, realizing that "every man must tell his story in his own true way" (Rushdie, *MC* 293).

Through Saleem, Rushdie stresses the way history is so easily made to suit racial dominance and cultural subordination because it relies mostly in memory: "the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool" (Rushdie, *Homelands* 24). In accordance with this perspective, Saleem Sinai is an unreliable narrator that often remembers unrealistic facts like they were unquestionable historical truths. His narration is riddled with mistakes and historical incongruences.

When talking about the history of the city of Bombay Saleem says that Mumbadevihas, the city`s patron goddess, is no longer people`s favorite and that "the calendar of festivals reveals her decline . . . Where is Mumbadevi's day?" (Rushdie, *MC* 123). In reality, this is not so and the festivals` calendar still includes the usual Mumbadevi Day. There were never concrete tetrapods used in a land reclamation rebellion, there were not any white troops at the Amritsar massacre, the State Express cigarette brand is not manufactured by W.D.& H.O. Wills like Saleem states, nor is General Sam Manekshaw the one who, by the end of the Bangladesh war, accepts the surrender of the Pakistan Army. It is also historically impossible for All-India Radio to have been playing Lata Mangeshkar as early as 1946, or for the train on which Saleem and Picture Singh travel to Bombay to have passed through Kurla because it is on a different line. When talking about Gandhi`s assassination, Saleem gives the wrong date but when he realizes it he does not try to correct it: "re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages on the wrong date. And this now cannot be corrected (Rushdie, *MC* 229-230). Instead he states that in his India "Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time" (Rushdie, *MC* 230). A nod to metanarratives, to the perspectives that, once written, are not changed and go on to become ´truths`. Later on Saleem justifies his historical mistakes by explaining that he has told his perspective of truth: "´I told you the truth,` I say yet again, ´Memory`s truth, because memory has its own special kind`" (Rushdie, *MC* 292) and he explains that "memory`s truth . . . selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogenous but usually coherent version of events (Rushdie, *MC* 292). Regarding his narrative, the narrator admits that errors and exaggerations are possible, and overstatements and he admits that he has fallen "victim to the temptation of every autobiographer . . . the illusion that since the past exists only in one's memories . . . it is possible to create past events by simply saying they occurred" (Rushdie, *MC* 443). Through the narrator readers realize just how easily these illusions become reality, or simply put, what is true for some is not necessarily reality.

Rushdie, in his own essay "´Errata`: or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight`s Children*", states that "it is by now obvious, I hope, that Saleem Sinai is an unreliable narrator, and that *Midnight's Children* is far from being an authoritative guide to history

of post-independence India" (Rushdie, *Homelands* 22-23). Rushdie explains why he chooses to introduce some inaccuracies on otherwise error-free passages:

> When I began the novel (as I've written elsewhere) my purpose was somewhat Proustian. Time and migration had placed a double filter between me and my subject, and I hoped that if I could only imagine vividly enough it might be possible to see beyond those filters. . . . what interested me was the process of filtration itself. So my subject changed, was no longer a search for lost time, had become the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool. Saleem's greatest desire is for what he calls meaning, and near the end of his broken life he sets out to write himself.... He is no dispassionate, disinterested chronicler. . . . He is cutting up history to suit himself. . . . He is also remembering . . . even after I found out that my memory was playing tricks my brain simply refused to unscramble itself. It clung to the false memory, preferring it to mere literal happenstance. . . . whenever a conflict arose between literal and remembered truth, I would favor the remembered version. . . . His story is not history, but it plays with historical shapes. . . . History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. The reading of Saleem's unreliable narration might be, I believed, a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to 'read' the world (Rushdie, *Homelands* 23-25).

Saleem`s errors seem to be Rushdie`s way of challenging official versions of the truth and revealing the importance of a critical reading of metanarratives like history. Even history can be fabricated according to perspective or to suit one`s needs in such a way that "sometimes legends make reality, and become more useful than the facts" (Rushdie, *MC* 57). One way the novel illustrates this is through Lila`s affair. Saleem cuts letters, words and syllables from the newspaper in order to put together a message to Commander Sabarmati letting him know that his wife, Lila, is cheating on him. He cuts up bits and pieces of apparently important political news to make the new message up.

And through this one can see how easy it is to rearrange historical facts to fit an individual (and sordid) purpose. And how easily anyone (even someone with some power, a commander like Commander Sabarmati) is the victim of such a thing: "Commander Sabarmati was only a puppet; I was the puppet master, and the nation performed my play – only I hadn`t meant it!" (Rushdie, *MC* 363). This results in Commander Sabarmati killing Lila and surrendering to the police: two lives lost and Saleem is left in shock. So nothing good comes from such a situation.

Rushdie brings forth a critical questioning about all the rewriting of history that usually takes place when a culture is colonized by another: "am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I`m prepared to distort everything- to rewrite the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?" (Rushdie, *MC* 230). Saleem`s questioning of why he cannot have a clear or detached perspective and his invitation for others to judge for him, seems to be Rushdie`s way of making the reader more critical. Because taking things as certainties is not good as Saleem cautions: "a little uncertainty is no bad thing. Coecksure men do terrible deeds. Women, too" (Rushdie, *MC* 294). The terrible deeds Saleem is alluding to here can be interpreted as the perpetuating of the lies institutionalized by metanarratives of cultural dominance. Such lies are perpetuated every time the person who comes in contact with them does not have a critical attitude. The author seems to want to make the reader more aware that what he or she reads in history books is merely someone else`s perspective (which usually involves distortions and even falsities) and that people should be critical. Because, as magically powerful as you are, like the Midnights` Children, nothing good happens when you have no critical perspective and let yourself be influenced by someone else. The Midnight's children, although magical, "are not immune to . . . the prejudices and world-views of adults [which] began to take over their minds" (Rushdie, *MC* 292) and this has led to problems, misunderstandings and to them becoming unable to communicate with each other. They reject Saleem's attempts to communicate with them and accuse him of egotism and secrecy and, instead of a moderated discussion or cooperation between all, the children of midnight are all fighting each other. These problems that arise from the lack of a critical stance, work very much like the hole in Aadam Aziz. While the first shouldn`t believe everything they ear, the latter is going to compensate the void by being accepting of historical discourses.

Aadam Aziz decides not to kiss earth for any God or man and this decision "made a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history" (Rushdie, *MC* 4). Because holes give one a vulnerability to try to fill them with anything, including a readiness to believe, to have an uncritical acceptance of history which can destroy you just as a dependency on women can. He is a man who no longer has a strong religious faith and, because of his need to believe in something, he is now vulnerable to compensate that through a sense of achievement and security with women and history instead. He is vulnerable to games of seduction which give him a sense of achievement and he is also vulnerable to believing in any historical discourse (true or not) that will give him also a sense of achievement and security. Overall, Rushdie reveals the constructedness of metanarratives like national history and advocates for the importance of a critical attitude as he subverts the certainties of the official version all the while not defending one ideology over the other: he does not display the Eurocentric versus Asian versions of history. In fact, Rushdie believes that historical incongruences are something natural and to be expected from both parties since they are an inevitable by-product of human nature. And it is of the human nature to have our perception of events influenced by a tendentious memory and all sorts of exterior influences that range from societal pressure to individual preferences. The author explains that

> human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures; cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death. (Rushdie, *Homelands* 13)

In order to illustrate these inevitable distortions, Rushdie uses the metaphor of pickling which consists both of preservation and alteration. The pickling process involves alterations and additions (altering and intensifying the flavors according to personal taste) which change the initial product into something else entirely different and then

preserve it. Among fruit, vegetables, fish, vinegar, and spices mixed according to his taste, Saleem also cans memories, dreams, and ideas to be preserved as his memory of history. It is no longer the original thing, it is Saleem`s perspective of things, hence the comparison between telling his story and India`s history to the pickling process needed to make chutney because this is a good metaphor for the infinity of possible combinations/perspectives. So every story he tells (every pickle jar) contains his perspective of history and every pickle jar is the proof that one can set to be preserved what one *wants* and not necessarily what *is*: "—every pickle jar (you will forgive me if I become florid for a moment) contains, therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! in words and pickles,I have immortalized my memories" (Rushdie, *MC* 642).

When Saleem reveals the identifying label (language) of some of the jars, one is certain that written language is Rushdie`s vehicle to reveal is his perspective of cultural, social, and political events that have taken place in a determined period of India`s history. Each of the jar labels he mentions has the name of one of the novel`s chapters, namely *Movements Performed by Pepperpots*, the title of the novel`s last chapter, *Alpha and Omega*, the name of the fifteenth chapter, or its seventeenth chapter, *Commander Sabarmati`s Baton*. For Saleem Sinai historical truth depends on perspective and memory as well as narratives such as cultural and religious texts which create their own truth. The version of history Saleem offers is filtered through his perspective, just like other versions of history are filtered through other perspectives and he hopes all these different versions (like variously flavoured pickles) may, one day, be taken in consideration: "—One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say . . . that they possess the authentic taste of truth . . . that they are, despite everything, acts of love" (Rushdie, *MC* 644).

These acts of love can be interpreted as the way Saleem has to inject personal truth in the reshaping of history that the colonial powers have done: it is a way for the subdued colonized individual to reveal his versions of the events. So the act of love here consists of making sure their version of the events gets heard and recorded for the future generations. As Rushdie notes, although historical ´truth` is always made of many

different perspectives facts must not be distorted in order to serve a sick mind: “what they must not become is the bizarre creation of a rambling, diseased mind” (Rushdie, *MC* 278). Although Saleem accepts some degree of distortions that come from individual perspectives, he does not agree with letting past events be transformed into something else entirely just to serve some dark political purpose. Saleem is critical of the passive acceptance of the western heritage the colonizer has left in India and, in scattered flashbacks, reveals the transformation in critical attitude from the time of his father (Aadam Aziz) to the time of his son who inherits the name of Saleem`s father. Through characters like Aadam Aziz, caught in a new surge of Indian nationalism that is born to fill the empty space created by the loss of identity during colonization, the narrator lets the reader know that in his father`s time Indians are more critical of western ´truths` and suspicious of westernized Indians. The humor in characters` language (such as Tai`s) reveals how the western world has, from the time of Saleem`s grandfather to the time when Saleem is young, become accepted. Saleem`s flashback takes the reader to the past, more precisely, to the moment when his grandfather (Aadam Aziz) returns to India after concluding his medicine studies in Heidelberg, Germany. In the eyes of his fellow countrymen, Aadam Aziz returns to India as a westernized Indian and he, himself, feels a bit out of place and unwelcomed as though they resent his western education. The old boatman`s Tai angry comments towards Aadam while crossing the river in a barge, exemplify the hostility towards westernized Indians back then:

> `A fine business. A wet-head nakkoo child goes away before he`s learned one damn thing and he comes back a big doctor sahib with a big bag full of foreign machines, and he`s still as silly as an owl. I swear: a too bad business . . . ´Big shot,` Tai is spitting into the lake, ´big bag, big shot. Pah! We haven`t got enough bags at home that you must bring back that thing made of a pig`s skin that makes one unclean just by looking at it? And inside, God knows whatall.` (Rushdie, *MC* 17-18)

It is clear that, to Tai, Aadam`s bag is the representation of the western colonizer that has separated young Indians from their ancestral traditions. And for him the western colonizer has achieved this, not necessarily by taking them physically away, but by filling the minds of young Indians with western beliefs so Tai is suspicious of Aadam`s

education and all the western gadgets and their ability to heal, and he trusts traditional Indian medicine instead:

> Aadam Aziz tries to engage Tai "tries to remake an old friendship; but Tai is in full flight now, a stream of invective pouring out of him. The Heidelberg bag quakes under the torrent of abuse. ´Sistersleeping pigskin bag from Abroad full of foreigner`s tricks. Big-shot bag. Now if a man breaks an arm that bag will not let the bone-setter bind it in leaves. Now a man must let his wife lie beside that bag and watch knives come and cut her open. A fine business, what these foreigners put in our young men`s heads. I swear: it is a too-bad thing. That bag should fry in Hell with the testicles of the ungodly.` (Rushdie, *MC* 19)

At the time of Saleem`s grandfather Indians have formed a resistance towards the influence of the colonizers and are more critical of westerners towards whom they even display some hostility. And this is so deeply engrained that even the westernized Indians like Aadam Aziz have a critical stance regarding the west. Although westernized, he still recognizes the bias, racist and discriminatory attitudes white westerners have towards Indians: in Germany he is taught politics and medicine but also realizes that everyone around him praises the Europeans for having discovered and having ´civilized` India. For his friends a civilized, educated Indian is never such as a result of Indian culture alone but only as a product of western influence in India. And this makes Aadam separate from his friends. Yet, this critical resilience is severely weakened by the time Saleem is born and has changed somewhat when Saleem is a young boy. Talking about his date of birth while narrating his family history, Saleem tells the reader that although formally gone from India, British cultural hegemony still controls Indian society. By the time he is born, on the date of India`s independence and with the British leaving, Saleem's father buys a retreating colonial house from William Methwold. Like India, the estate will only be transferred on midnight of August the 15th paralleling the national events of the transfer of India from the British colonizer to the Indian people. This comes, however, with a condition: the content of the house must remain exactly the same and cannot be changed. This anglicizes Saleem's family and the other families that buy the other houses on the estate because it controls Indians in a more subliminal and insidious manner all the while giving the impression that they are

free. Because Indians are left with a personal space that is formatted to the tastes of the colonizer (with their English gardens, their English cocktails, their English furniture and English ways of eating), they are now mimicking the way of living of the British. A way of living they see has more civilized because the British are considered so when they are in India and Indians see it as a privilege to have all the typically British paraphernalia so living that life style is considered to be a symbol of status:

> Every evening at six they are out in their gardens, celebrating the cocktail hour, and when William Methwold comes they slip effortlessly into their imitation Oxford drawls; and they are learning about ceiling-fans and gas cookers and the correct diet for budgerigars, and Methwold, supervising their transformation, is mumbling under his breath. (Rushdie, *MC* 131)

Although the British colonizer is gone, the influence of the British hegemony remains in the cultural fashions of the formerly colonized Indian society. And when Saleem is a young boy this has escalated to an uncritical acceptance of everything western. When Saleem describes the arrival of his first boyhood crush, Evelyn, he exposes how Indian culture is being influenced by western culture:

> ´In India, we`ve always been vulnerable to Europeans . . . Evie had only been with us a matter of weeks, and already I was being sucked into a grotesque mimicry of European literature. (We had done Cyrano, in a simplified version, at school; I had also read the *Classics Illustrated* comic book.) Perhaps it would be fair to say that Europe repeats itself, in India, as farce . . . Evie was American. Same thing.` (Rushdie, *MC* 256)

Unlike the time of his grandfather`s youth, by the time Saleem is a child, he depicts Indian people as immediately accepting of everything western particularly in the fields of culture and business. Because a western girl arrives at his school the whole school program changes all of the sudden to include European literature. Saleem`s account of the acceptance of western literary cannons shows that Indian society keeps westernizing itself. Saleem compares this westernization of India to a disease, like his son`s tuberculosis, and adverts that this disease is a metaphor for a larger macrocosmic disease. Already as an adult, and after the independence of India, Saleem takes a critical stance

regarding the uncritical acceptance of anything western, which he sees as a disease for India:

> during the first nine years after Independence, a similar pigmentation disorder (whose first recorded victim may well have been the Rani of Cooch Naheen) afflicted large numbers of the nation`s business community. All over India, I stumbled across good Indian businessmen . . . businessmen who had become or were becoming very, very pale indeed! It seems that the gargantuan (even heroic) efforts involved in taking over from the British and becoming masters of their own destinies had drained the colour from their cheeks. (Rushdie, *MC* 248)

The Rani of Cooch Naheen, whose disease is spreading amidst Indian society, is becoming white because of big white blotches appearing all over his skin. For him this westernization is the disease of India, "a disease which leaked into history and erupted on an enormous scale shortly after independence" (Rushdie, *MC* 53). The uncritical acceptance of western values (what you are told, what you read, etc) ends up affecting history because official versions of it are never contested and the ´truth` or other perspectives end up never being known. For the Saleem of the present fighting this disease consists of a clear effort to keep the memory of certain events alive:

> Today, the papers are talking about the supposed political rebirth of Mrs Indira Gandhi; but when I returned to India, concealed in a wicker basket, ´The Madam` was basking in the fullness of her glory. Today, perhaps, we are already forgetting, sinking willingly into the insidious clouds of amnesia; but I remember, and will set down, how I – how she – how it happened that . . . (Rushdie, *MC* 538)

Language, in the form of journalistic news (the newspapers) is used for political purposes (to campaign for the political resurfacing of Indira Gandhi), and Rushdie uses language (in the form of a novel) to bring general awareness to facts that seem to have been forgotten. The reader is left with the feeling that Saleem`s story is told to make sure a perspective of history contrary to the one put forward by colonialist ideology, is registered. Historical events such as the Indian 'Mutiny' of 1857 have been intentionally

disguised by colonial historiographers as acts of vile sabotage against the Empire and the dominant historical discourse has silenced the Indian perspective on the incident. For the British colonialists the possibility that Indian people might be the ones writing about themselves (their history, their culture) is seen almost as an impossibility (or something that should never happen) and in a very negative manner. India has never been seen as a great nation by the British, something that Saleem shatters with one paragraph alone in which he shows that India is a great nation with five thousand years of history and is now going through an historical change because Indians have chosen to believe in their own narratives of ´nation`:

> This year [1947] there was [. . .] a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat. (Rushdie, *MC* 4)

Not only does he use language to remind people of the Indian version of facts that have been forgotten and lay openly unquestioned, but the author also uses language to reveal how certain Indian characters continue an oppressive behaviour typical of the colonizer. Rushdie`s writing succeeds in demonstrating how a postcolonial subject has the freedom to create his or her own historical narrative in order to destabilize colonial narratives. A counter-discourse to the discursive dominance of the hegemonic structures and institutions of colonization. The British colonizer has formatted colonized India`s history but through *Midnight`s Children*, Rushdie has brought a critical look upon history setting it free from the colonizer`s possession and domination. Now, as the narrator announces: “memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks” (Rushdie, *MC* 44), because another side to all these historical events has been told and their memory preserved for the future. The novel uses the fictional strategy of magical realism to save the individual memory of events (histories) from being lost with the passing of time so that they are present to confront the official versions. So Saleem

ends the novel with the warning that "one jar must remain empty" (Rushdie, *MC* 645) in order to receive future histories. To oppose injustice and totalitarian discourses and stop them becoming the only accepted truths, Rushdie uses a language riddled with humour and satire that, by itself, makes the reader question its hidden meaning.

Through determined narrative strategies such as sarcasm, magical realism, the depiction of multiple perspectives and unreliable narrators, both authors oppose manifestations of unequal distribution of power supported by myths of national superiority. The analysis of Kureishi`s use of language reveals he subverts expectations and evades the burden of representation through the comical exploitation of ethnic stereotypes. Refusing to be simply classified as an ethnic writer or the poster child of the British-Asian community, Kureishi`s narrative itself seems to advocate for independence from post-colonial agendas or minority interests, establishing Kureishi`s position as a universalist writer as opposed to a strictly post-colonial writer. Because of its hybridity, Kureishi`s novel is impossible to classify as one determinate literary genre. Hence it is studied in theoretical literature not only as a postcolonial novel, but also as a carnivalesque novel, a bildungsroman, a postmodern novel, a comedy or a grotesque realism novel or picaresque novel. Kureishi`s refusal to pinned down by expectations or definitions makes it difficult to categorize the novel or to decipher both the author and his protagonist's ultimate political position. The humour and comedy in Karim`s narration gives the narrative a carnivalesque atmosphere that is used to portray the exaggerations of youth. It is through this language that Kureishi shows how cultural codes and metanarratives shape the individual, and how language can be used against social injustice. Karim`s crude humour Kureishi has the freedom to subvert expectations and question nationalistic discourses because linguistic elements such as sarcasm and parody are Kureishi`s way of subverting the colonial legacy of discrimination still present in British society. Like Kureishi, there is also a subversive relevance to Rushdie`s writing style and the manner in which he uses narrative resources like magical realism, satire, allegory or fantasy to be critical and subversive of British cultural hegemony. Rushdie uses fantasy in the novel in order to depict a perspective of reality as something subjective and connects the individual sphere with the collective to reveal a different version of the official history and to allow the marginalized to explain their reality of historical events instead of having the colonizing power explaining events on their behalf. Rushdie uses language to convey a critique of the growing and

uncritical acceptance of everything Western in India from before independence to after independence, and to alert to the fact that people should be critical of official versions of the truth (such as history). Rushdie`s stylistic choice of mixing fantasy or magical realism with history is used to get serious points across: the official version of history that has been established by the British colonialist power, or historical truths (such as the time difference between India and Pakistan) are questioned and exposed as something that is often the product of political interests. Midnight`s Children reveals how language is important in contesting and subverting the truths of British cultural hegemony: how language (just like Saleem`s pickling) preserves individual versions of history, more specifically, the versions of the marginal or the colonized, that would otherwise be forever lost.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout this study, both novels reveal the marginal perspective of the culturally hybrid individual and depict identity and employ language strategies in a way that undermines British cultural hegemony. Identity wise, the novels reaffirm the possibility of a liminal place of struggles but also of opportunity, of recreation of the self and continuous transformation. The authors play with the notions of ethnicity, gender and nation to convey their subversive take on identity. Kureishi displays the naturality of the performative character of identity by depicting characters that keep recreating new identities or even role-play other identities. Rushdie sees hybridity as something quite positive and brings forth the hybridism of India and all its myriad of perspectives as a power and a gift. Both *Midnight`s Children* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* depict gender and personal identity from a perspective outside the binaries of male/female or Indian/British that escapes what either culture determines. Characters like Karim and Jamila (*The Buddha of Suburbia*) are sexually fluid and alternate between genders according to their sexual preference of the moment and Saleem (*Midnight`s Children*) is capable of entering the bodies of men and women and living as either. Both novels reveal characters that have no allegiance to a determined ethnicity (be it their own or other) as they construct identities that have characteristics of different ethnicities/cultures. Their concept of identity as an ongoing shifting process destroys hegemonic conceptions because it goes beyond the binaries assigned by power structures (such as male/female, British/Indian) that everyone is supposed to comply with.

Both writers use linguistic strategies to advocate for artistic freedom, challenge expectations and question metanarratives (such as historical *truths*) by exposing individualized perspectives of historical events. While Kureishi uses humour, sarcasm or parody to bring forward the voice of the marginalised Indian immigrant in Britain, Rushdie chooses mixing magical realism with history in order to question and expose the official version of history established by the British colonialist power as something that is often the product of political interests. Their linguistic choices underline the importance both authors attribute to the freedom of being able to represent their own cultures. They do not accept the burden of traditional ways of representation and feel

they are free to depict their characters` flaws regardless of ethnicity. The novels expose the questionable behaviour from both the British colonizer and the colonized. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, although there are numerous examples of racism from the British towards Indians, Changez reveals himself to be just as racist towards Pakistanis, Karim is increasingly at ease with playing stereotypical views of his own culture for a pay and Haroon profits from deceiving the British by making them believe he is an enlightened guru. In *Midnight`s Children* despite all the racist demeanour of the British regarding Indians, it is the Indian women that embody racism: they perpetuate racism against their own by stigmatising those with darker skin or, like The Widow (who murders, sterilizes and persecutes her Indian countrymen) emulate the aggressive behaviour of the colonialist. Kureishi challenges conceptual binaries, such as inside and outside, centre and periphery, self and other, and shows the reader how both Indian and British characters try censoring how they are portrayed. This shows the reader that the ways in which a culture is talked about is not necessarily true as it is the result of many interests and points of view. Rushdie applies the notions of ´in-betweeness` and hybridity to the concept of 'home', 'belonging' and 'nation' in order to reveal these concepts can be ambivalent and fluid and uses his writing to criticize the British colonizer and the Indian ruling class that emulates their oppressive ways. While free to identify with any ethnicity or gender, characters are also free to criticize or question whatever, including historical truths produced by the British imperialistic agenda. These writers challenge the burden of post-colonial representation and are equally critical of both Indian and British. They address myths of cultural purity, whether regarding the British (showing that throughout history, being considered English is mostly a matter of politics) or the Indians, with the example of the Bombayites, whose culture is the result of other cultures that inhabited the area previously, namely the Portuguese. Through their characters both writers question racism and the oppression of the non-white, marginalised post-colonial subject in Britain, but also reveal the dominant ways in which cultural hegemony conveys concepts like history, identity and community. Both authors promote a literary space where there is room to challenge the social rules inherited from the colonizer and to question his Eurocentric version of history.

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